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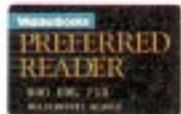
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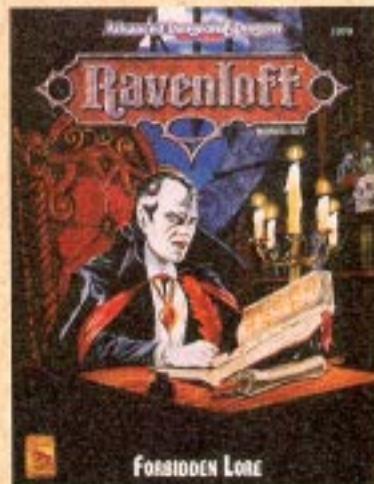
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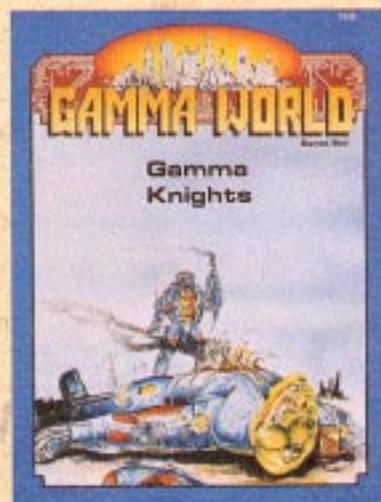
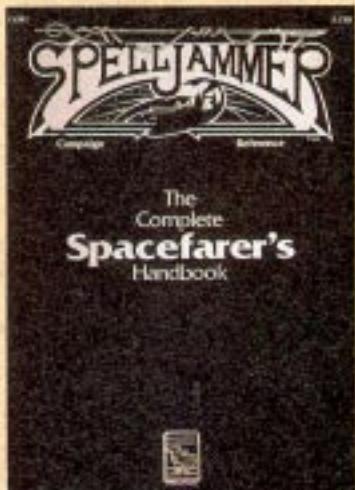
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Publisher
James M. Ward

Editor
Roger E. Moore

Associate editor
Dale A. Donovan

Fiction editor
Barbara G. Young

Editorial assistant
Wolfgang H. Baur

Art director
Larry W. Smith

Production staff
Gaye O'Keefe Tracey Zamagne

Subscriptions
Janet L. Winters

U.S. advertising
Cindy Rick

U.K. correspondent
and U.K. advertising
Wendy Mottaz

CONTENTS

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

9 **Lore of the Blasted World: The DARK SUN™ Campaign**

Where only the strong survive—sometimes.

10 **The Arena Master's Arsenal** — Timothy B. Brown

Ten of the deadliest weapons any fighter can hold.

18 **Mastered, Yet Untamed** — Timothy B. Brown

Athas has no horses, but it does have driks, jalath'gak, and undead wattoaches.

FICTION

34 **Water and Ashes** — fiction by Allen Varney

The roots of good and evil are closely entwined in the dry soil of Athas.

REVIEWS

64 **Role-playing Reviews I** — Rick Swan

Which games have the most goodies inside? Here's one gamer's opinion.

82 **Role-playing Reviews II** — Allen Varney

Cyberpunk game worlds are alive and well . . . and dangerous to your characters.

90 **The Role of Books** — John C. Bunnell

Imagine what you could do if you could teleport—then read about a teenager who does.



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112 **Through the Looking Glass** — Robert Bigelow
A box full of high-powered fantasy from the DARK SUN world.

OTHER FEATURES

26 **Twenty Tricks for Castle Defense** — Fraser Sherman
Goblins knocking at your gates? Here's some advice for all castle owners.

41 **The Voyage of the Princess Ark** — Bruce A. Heard
A brain-eating monster hunted the lizard folk—and now it hungers for the admiral and his crew.

56 **Magic in the Evening** — Ed Greenwood
The two most famous wizards of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® and GREYHAWK® campaigns meet at last!

71 **The MARVEL®-Phile** — Steven E. Schend
Operation: Galactic Storm is over, but memories of its heroes live on.

88 **The Game Wizards** — William W. Connors
Win friends-and new gamers—with the DRAGON QUEST™ game!

DEPARTMENTS

4 Letters	98 Forum
6 Editorial	102 Dragonmirth
30 Convention Calendar	104 Twilight Empire
76 Sage Advice	108 Gamers Guide
96 TSR Previews	

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COVER

"Bloodweaver" is the name of both our cover painting and the central figure, as rendered by TSR artist Brom. Rather than being upset at being surrounded by hostile warriors, Bloodweaver seems to be enjoying his turn at hands-on diplomacy.

LETTERS

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

Computer query

Dear Dragon,

I have been a reader of DRAGON Magazine and a supporter of TSR for many years, but I have one complaint. For many years, I have watched TSR announce the release of role-playing computer games in IBM, Amiga, and Apple formats—but never in the Atari ST format. Why?

William Kay Briggs
St. George UT

Our publisher, Jim Ward, informs me that the Atari ST system is now defunct; no further games for that system will be produced from Strategic Simulations, Inc. (the company with the license to design games based on TSR's role-playing games).

What's a pegasaur?

Dear Dragon,

I have a couple of questions that I think only your staff can answer.

I have all of the AD&D® 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium* volumes, and I was wondering, what happened to the pegasaur? I have the TSR Trading Card of the pegasaur, but I can find no further information on the creature.

I have missed DRAGON issues #161-178. Have you made a *Best of DRAGON Magazine* anthology, volume VI?

Would it still be possible to get artwork from Robin Wood? I was reading issue #149, and you said it was possible to get artwork from her, I want only the artwork entitled "Trinket" from issue #149.

Last of all, let me say that you have a great magazine; keep it up. I really hope this letter gets to see print.

John B. Cannon
Dover DE

A pegasaur? Your editor wandered around the Games division asking various people if they remember anything about a "pegasaur" in the TSR Trading Cards, but no one does. Could you (or someone else) give us a little more information about the card with this creature on it? It sounds like a cross between a pegasus and a dinosaur, which would be pretty peculiar.

We have no "Best of" anthologies in the works, and volume V was the last one we put together.

You can write to Robin Wood (or any other artist whose work has appeared in our magazines) by writing to them c/o DRAGON Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

And thank you. For an opposing viewpoint, see the following letter.

You stink!

Dear Dragon,

I'm not writing this letter expecting it to get printed. After all, you guys print only letters praising your magazine. The people telling you what a great job you do are, in my opinion, nothing more than brainwashed idiots. Your magazine stinks, and it doesn't help the gaming industry.

Your mag would be fine if everyone happened to play only TSR games. That fact is, people don't. I mean, open up your narrow limited minds and realize that some of us enjoy other games besides yours. Take "Sage Advice," for instance: The "sage" will gladly answer any questions you may have—if they pertain to TSR games.

Why don't you write about games like, say, Palladium Books' RIFTS® game. It's probably the hottest game on the market, and you don't even mention it. You get so wrapped up in your own boring games that you don't even give credit to any other great RPGs. The only way they get publicity in your mag is to put in a mega-dollar ad. I know you'll probably say that you give plenty of credit to other games in "Role-playing Reviews." That happens to be nothing more than second-rate critics running down good games.

I suggest you start helping the already hurting gaming world by giving credit where credit is due. Heck, if it wasn't for the genius of Kevin Siembieda, I probably wouldn't be role-playing today.

P.S. The only reason my friends and I read your magazine is to look at the ads.

Richard Shiers
Atascadero CA

Well, at least you like our ads!

You do, of course, have the freedom to buy the gaming magazine that fits your needs. There are many games and recreations that DRAGON Magazine doesn't cover, and we make no pretense of the fact that our coverage is primarily (but not exclusively) devoted to the AD&D and D&D® games. We sell about 100,000 issues each month to readers across North America, Europe, and Australia, among other places, and each issue is read by about twice that many individuals (according to the results of one of our recent surveys). Our focus on TSR's games comes in large part because that's just what those 200,000 readers want (again, according to our most recent surveys) and because your editors and the "sage" are familiar with only a limited number of RPGs; we can't play them all,

so we can't edit rules-specific pieces that we don't understand. Nonetheless, we have managed to get a few good pieces on non-TSR games into our pages, and we sometimes get articles with gaming ideas applicable to many games at once (see "Unidentified Gaming Objects," in issue #183, for example).

If DRAGON Magazine isn't meeting your needs, you might wish to consider subscribing to another gaming magazine with materials more to your liking. One that comes to mind is GDW's Challenge magazine, which covers science-fiction RPGs (particularly those from GDW). For more information, write to: Challenge, P.O. Box 1646, Bloomington IL 61702-1646. White Wolf magazine, which covers numerous non-TSR games as well, is another possibility; write to: White Wolf, 4598-B Stonegate Industrial Blvd., Stone Mountain GA 30083.

By the way, you ought to know from reading our magazine that many of the non-TSR games we review are praised quite highly by the reviewers. You might be interested to know that the people who write those game reviews are among the most respected writers in the gaming industry, and many have design credits with companies other than TSR. You might also be interested to know that we habitually forward any "Sage Advice" questions we receive concerning the games of other companies to those companies themselves, so the readers' questions may be answered directly by people who are much better equipped to answer them than we are. (We recommend, however, that readers write directly to the manufacturers, not to us.) Then again, considering the tone of your letter, you probably aren't interested. Still, we wish you the best.

Holo-headaches

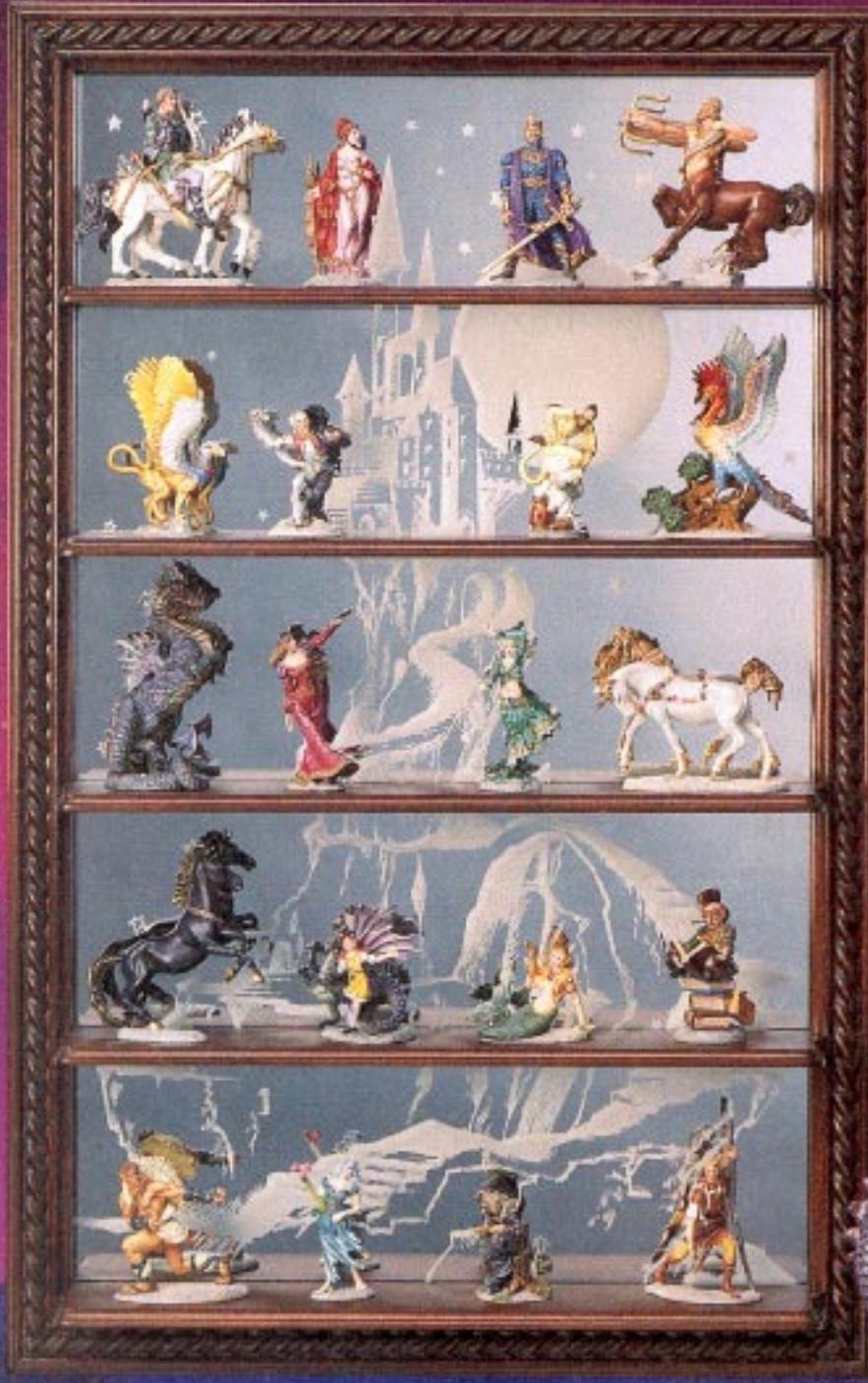
Dear Dragon,

I was looking at a past letters column and the question of a hologram on the cover came up. Back in January 1989 (issue #141), it wasn't cost-effective, but I was wondering if it could be done now. In the past three years, holograms have become somewhat more common and cheaper. It would be great to see one gracing your cover.

Jonathan Liming
Signal Hill CA

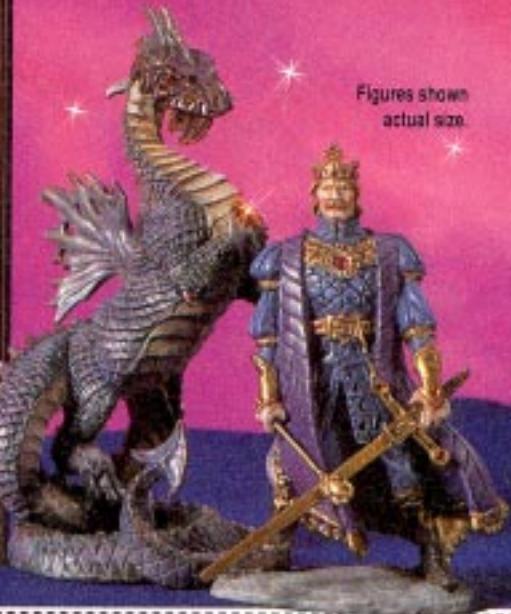
We are willing to try new ideas with our cover art (just look at the cover of issue #184, for example), but a hologram cover still makes us hesitate and mumble. We'll see. Issue #100 was embossed, and we have issue #200 coming up in December 1993, of course. Stick around and see what we'll do.

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EDITORIAL



The editor has a grumpy spell

My mail lately has contained a few particularly interesting (i.e., annoying) letters from readers who will not be named here, though they know who they are. I'm in the mood to respond to some of their comments. Let's see what we've got.



We'll start with a light topic. We have letters from readers "W" and "X", who cannot fathom why our magazine would have cover art with flying space whales on it (issue #183). In the past, we have published cover paintings of elves, dwarves, goblins, wizards, witches, thieves, clerics, warriors, ghosts, castles, Greek and Norse gods playing a magical video game, giant frogs, winged frogs, cartoon characters, undead ninja, undead frost giants, living chess pieces, scantily clad barbarian men and women, cute beholders, jet fighter cockpits, and even (on many occasions) dragons. We put flying space whales on

that cover because the artwork, aside from being quite beautiful, evoked a sense of wonder in us. Not every cover needs to have a fierce monster or violent battle on it. The artwork also perfectly capsuled the issue's theme on mixing science and magic in role-playing game campaigns, and the subject itself is very much a part of the AD&D® game universe, which forms the core of DRAGON® Magazine's topical matter. We're glad we had flying space whales, and we have no regrets. Thank you, "W" and "X".

We have several letters that were sent to DRAGON Magazine but do not concern the magazine itself. Many readers write to us with comments, questions, and complaints about other TSR products, *which is perfectly okay with us*. You may continue doing this. Seriously. We take all such mail and pass it along to the proper authorities, be they game designers, game editors, artists, marketing and sales people, vice presidents, and so on. Read our mail and pay attention to it. Your input is valuable and helps us make better games.

However, I'm looking at a letter from a reader I'll call "Y", who is perfectly enraged that the AD&D 2nd Edition game rules were "written for anybody who could read." He further states that the AD&D game "used to be a game for SMART people" and claims that "[m]ore and more we are seeing CHILDREN playing" the game (the emphasis is his). He believes that this will ruin the hobby and destroy the game's good reputation, as having "vulnerable and immature minds" playing the game will lead to tragedy.



"Y", you are messed up. First, anyone who plays either edition of the AD&D game (as well as many of the other complex role-playing games on the market today) is bound to have a very healthy dose of smarts, as well as a particularly rich imagination. It takes real brain power to juggle the facts and figures involved in generating your character, particularly those from the more esoteric races, classes, or universes; try a drow wizard/cleric with a psionic wild talent who was born in the RAVENLOFT® universe, for example. It also takes a liberal supply of imagination to even picture the character I just described. Because handling the variables involved in playing a role-playing game can be a complex task in itself, it pays to make the rules as clear as possible, and we feel we were quite successful in doing so with the AD&D 2nd Edition (a conclusion you appear to agree with even while you criticize us for it). If the rules are obtuse, confusing, dense, and require a dictionary in order to interpret, then few people are going to want to play the game (an outcome you appear to desire). Well, "Y",



tough noogies. If you want obtuse, hard-to-read rules, you should not even be playing the AD&D game in either edition; you should be designing computer games in PASCAL.

Furthermore, "Y", I find it obnoxious to see that age bigotry in gaming is still alive and well. Gamers should be fun-loving but relatively mature, which in no way comments on their actual age. I've played in campaigns with 12-year-olds who were better gamers than some adults I knew who would throw down their dice and go off and sulk when their characters had a bad time. (It should also be obvious that if more people learn to play the AD&D game, there will be more gamers to play with, eh?) I also find it sad to see that you are buying into the idea that role-playing games cause tragedy, because that's a lot of horse manure and you should know better. Find a copy of DRAGON issue #171 and read the guest editorial, "Role-playing and the real world," by Michael Stackpole; it is very enlightening.



We move back to the letter from "W", who among other things says he has never used anything from the "Sage Advice" column "because I am one of the few D.M.s that has accually [sic] read the books." He adds that "the closest thing to canon in the AD&D game" is not the idea that "if you don't know the answer, make it up"; instead, he believes such canon to be the AD&D 1st Edition rules, in which

he says it is clearly stated "what is to be done and not done."

I don't think you've read the AD&D 1st Edition rules very closely, "W", because they (like the AD&D 2nd Edition rules) were not designed to cover every possible situation, and they had their own share of errors and loopholes, like any other set of game rules. DRAGON Magazine has published "Sage Advice" for years, and the column has filled in many gaps in both editions of the AD&D game, as well as the D&D® game and others.

Here's a quick test:

1. The illusionist spell *phantom steed*, from *Unearthed Arcana* (page 68), has a material component that was not named. What is it? (See "Sage Advice" in DRAGON issue #117, page 32, for the answer.)

2. Can a character who is paralyzed yell for help, use psionics, or cast spells? (See "Sage Advice" in issue #76, page 64.)

3. Where can a wizard put a *sphere of annihilation* when he is not using it? (See "Sage Advice" in issue #180, page 80.)

Lacking these sources, someone running a game is just going to have to make up the answers. The original author of the AD&D 1st Edition game, Gary Gygax, pointed out the following on page 8 of the *Players Handbook*: "This game is unlike chess in that the rules are not cut and dried. In many places they are guidelines and suggested methods only." He also wrote (the capital lettering is his) that "THE REFEREE IS THE FINAL ARBITER OF ALL AFFAIRS OF HIS OR HER CAMPAIGN." Nothing could be clearer. "Sage Advice" was designed to assist game referees, and it has ably done so. If you refuse to use it, that is your right and we support you for it, but the question of whether your stand is correct is purely a subjective one.



Finally, I have a letter from "Z", who is upset because there are gay, lesbian, and

bisexual gamers. Welcome to the real world, "Z". I am not concerned with the sexual orientation of gamers any more than I am concerned with their race, creed, religion, age, sex, educational background, national origin, physical condition, political affiliation, eye color, or what have you. It just isn't any of my business, except in a marketing sense. All I care about is whether gamers are having a good time while they play games (well, yeah, I care about whether they read this magazine, too). If I do make a point about someone's particulars, it's usually because the person feels some discrimination; this editorial stand has been well supported in this magazine.



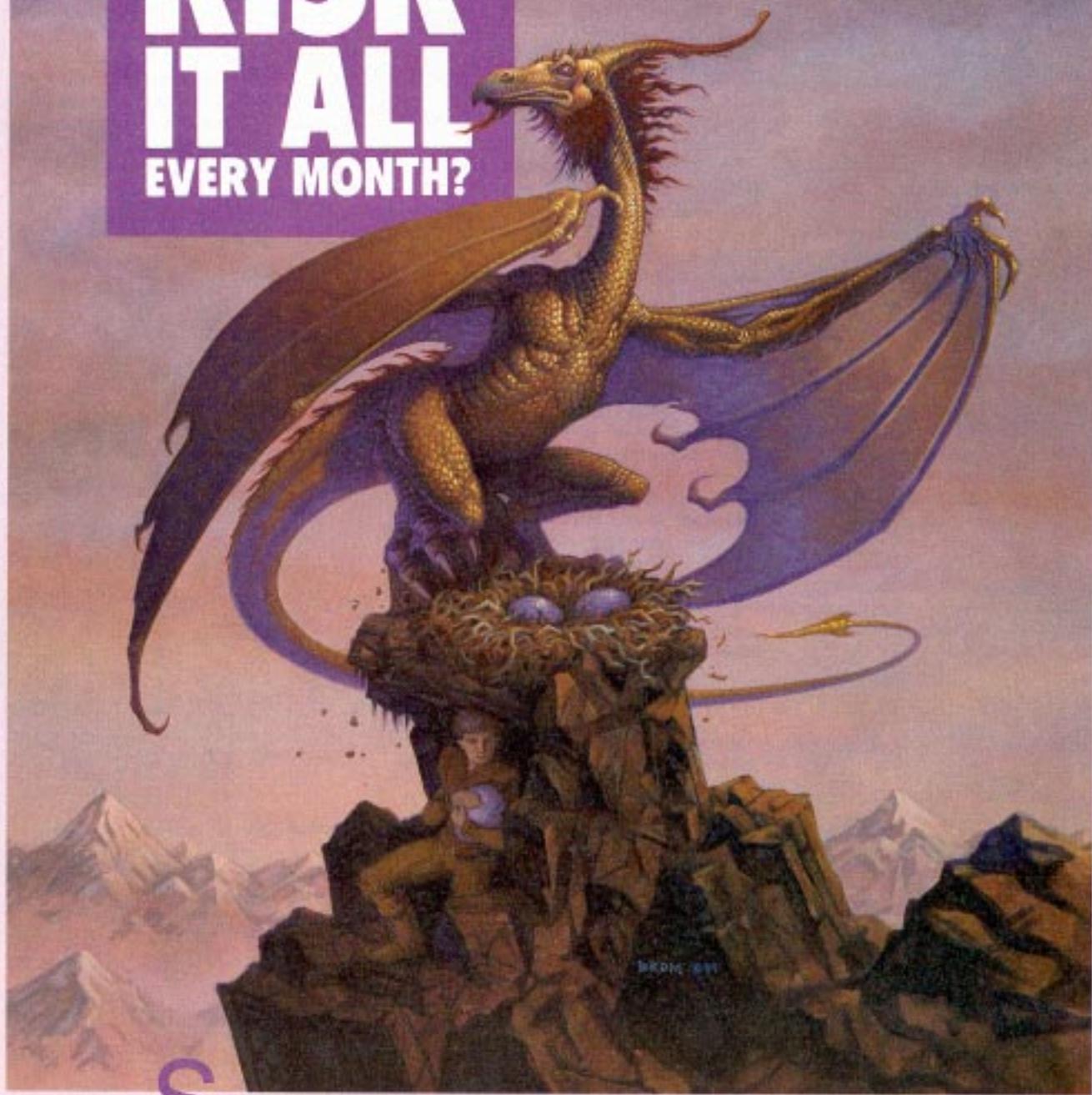
I feel much better now that I've gotten all that off my chest. Thank you all for listening, and thanks to our four letter writers as well.

Roger E. Moore

Wrath of the Immortals boxed set errata

On page 69 of Book Two (*The Immortals' Fury*) in this set, the title "Immortals Showdown" should appear just before the last paragraph at the bottom of column one.

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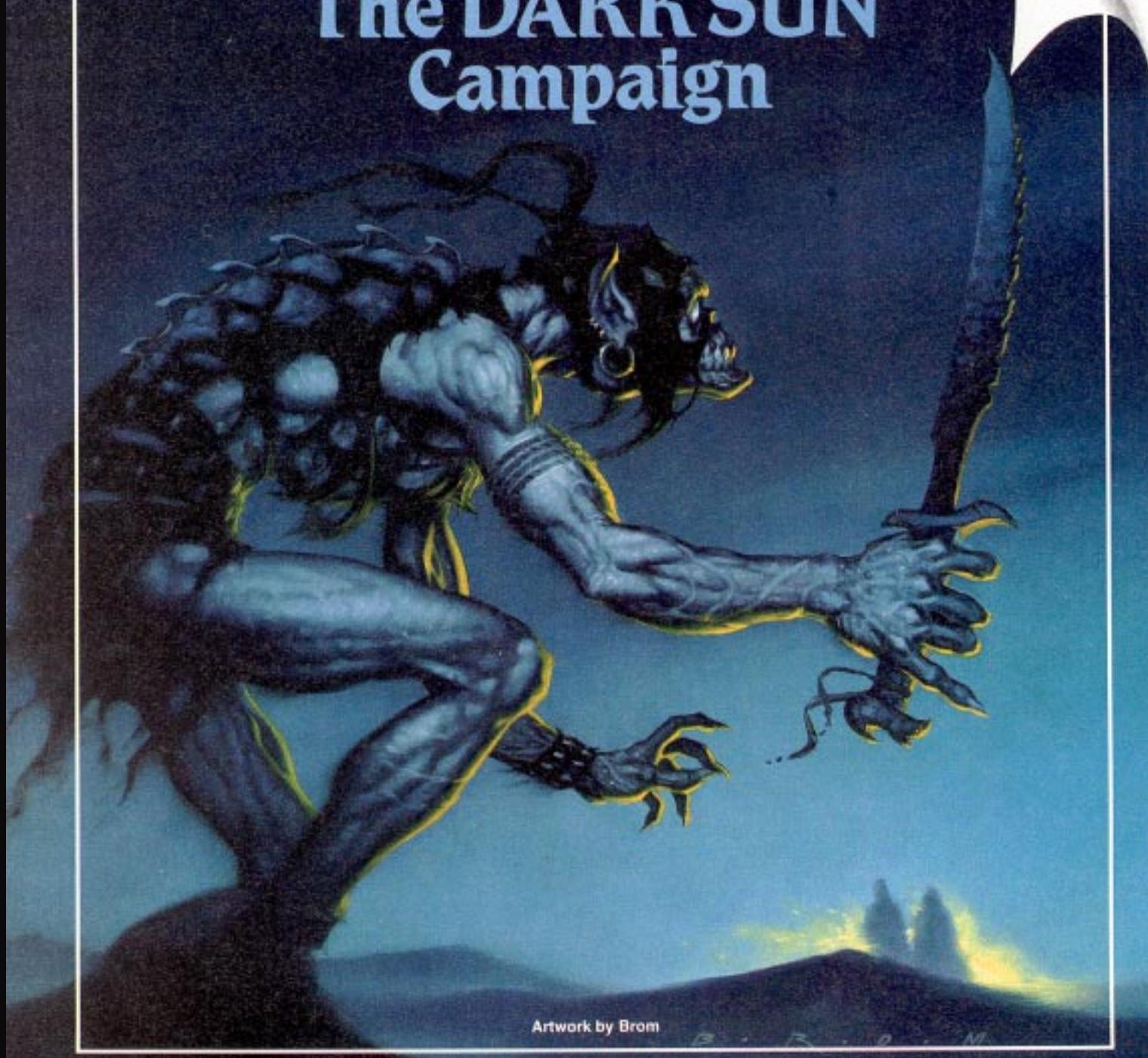
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Lore of the Blasted World

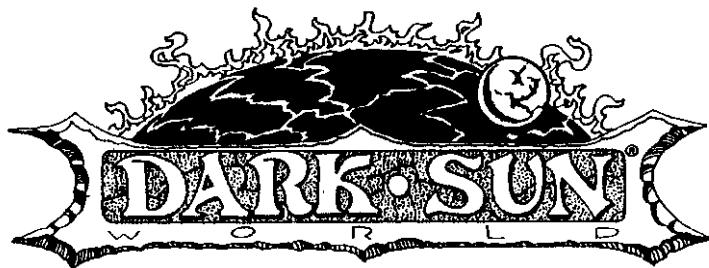
The DARK SUN™ Campaign



Artwork by Brom

The Arena Master's Arsenal





New weapons forged in the DARK SUN™ setting

by Timothy B. Brown

Artwork by Brom

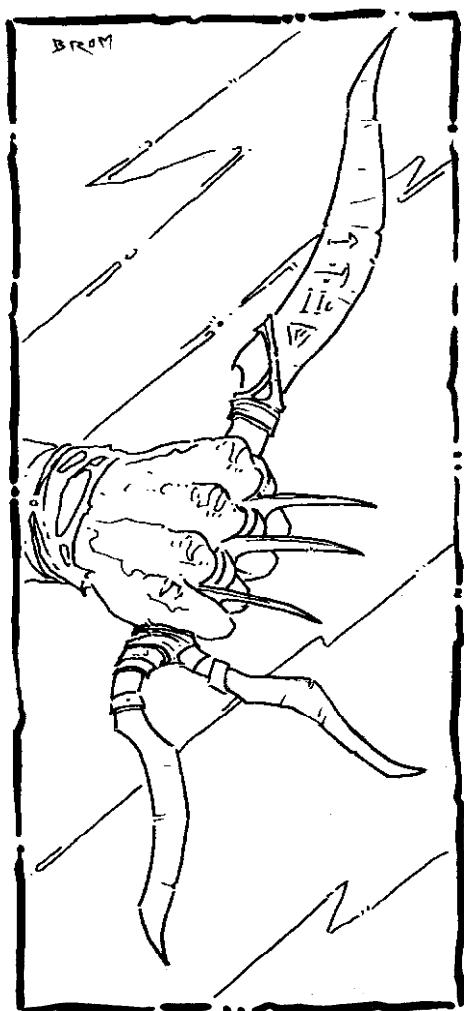
The arenas, courts, streets, and deserts of Athas are home to a variety of strange and exotic weapons, many made for unique purposes. The most successful weapons have become fairly widespread. Gladiators know of them all—if your character is brave, seek one out and he'll gladly give you a demonstration. Details on the weapons given here are broken down as follows:

Proficient and Specialized use: Each

weapon is given a proficient use benefit and a specialized use benefit. A warrior who specializes with a given weapon gains both benefits, since he had to become proficient before he could specialize. Any bonuses listed here are in addition to any specialization benefits; for example, if a weapon's damage is supposed to be doubled, it is doubled after all normal specialization bonuses are applied.

Weapon material: The prices, weights,

and damage values given here assume that the weapon has metal components. All of these weapons can be made with other materials according to the Weapon Materials Table (DARK SUN Rules Book, page 51). Note that the cahulak, crusher, datchi club, and master's whip can be easily made without metal; they can easily be purchased for 1% of the price listed and used without damage or attack penalties, regardless of materials used.



Bard's friend

Cost: 10 gp

Weight: 3

Size: S

Type: P/S

Speed Factor: 3

Damage S-M/L: 1d4 + 1/1d3

Popularized by the bards of Balic, the bard's friend is a particularly gruesome-looking weapon, sporting several blades and prongs. If properly used, it is an excellent parrying weapon and brawl-stopper. The blades themselves are most often formed of metal or obsidian, strapped and mounted to a central wooden grip. The prongs are usually metal or wood, though they can be the fangs of desert predators. The grip may have holes for the fingers; when there are no holes, the weapon is usually worn with leather straps holding it to the hand. Known to be a bard's weapon, it is not uncommon to see the blades dripping with poison.

Proficient use: A proficient user is familiar enough with his weapon to know the dangers of storage. He can conceal his bard's friend beneath clothing on his legs, arms, torso, or back with a simple leather strap. So concealed, the weapon can be drawn instantly at the beginning of any combat round. Nonproficient users can only hope to conceal their bard's friend without inflicting injury (1d2 - 1 hp damage per round of attempted concealment).

Specialized use: In addition to being able to conceal his bard's friend on his person, a specialized warrior can use his bard's friend as a parrying weapon or as a

second weapon, at his option, every round. When used to parry, the bard's friend affords the warrior a +3 AC bonus while allowing him to fight with a weapon in his other hand without penalty (unlike normal parrying that requires the character to cease all attacks; see the *DUNGEON MASTER™ Guide*, page 61). When used as a second weapon, the warrior suffers penalties to each weapon's attack rolls as normal. The warrior must announce his intention to use his weapon to parry or attack each round before initiative is rolled.

Cahulaks

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 12

Size: M

Type: P/B

Speed Factor: 5

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d6

Cahulaks are a pair of four-bladed weapons held together with a length of rope. They can be used in each hand as melee weapons; one or both can also be thrown to tangle and cause damage to an opponent.

The blades are commonly carved from the hip or shoulder bones of a mekillot, but more expensive versions can be forged of steel. The hafts are made of solid lengths of wood or, rarely, sturdy bone. The connecting rope is up to 12' long; an experienced cahulak wielder keeps most of that length looped loosely in one hand when preparing for combat.

Proficient use: The wielder can attack with both cahulaks, one in each hand,

according to the "Attacking with Two Weapons" rules in the *Player's Handbook* (page 96), even though both cahulaks are technically the same size. A proficient character can throw the pair of cahulaks. The target suffers two attacks, but each successful attack only inflicts half normal damage (1d3/1d3). Also, man-sized and smaller creatures can be tangled unless they save vs. petrification. Tangling prevents normal attacks and movement for one round.

Specialized use: A specialized wielder also can attempt to grapple a foe by throwing one cahulak the full length of the connecting rope (12' maximum). On a successful attack roll, the target suffers half-normal damage (1d3/1d3) and the cahulak has grappled the target. Once grappled, the wielder can trip or pull the target off balance, thus preventing it from attacking, depending on the target's relative size. If the grappled target is smaller, the wielder can automatically keep him off balance. If the target is his size or larger, the target must save vs. petrification or be pulled off balance. Targets more than two size categories larger than the wielder cannot be pulled off balance.

Crusher

Cost: 24 gp

Weight: 9

Size: L

Type: B

Speed Factor: 10

Damage S-M/L: 1d4/1d3

A crusher is a spiked stone or metal ball at the end of a 20'-25' flexible pole. The wielder plants one end of the pole in the ground, then whips the weighted end back and forth until it nearly strikes the ground both in front of and behind him.

Weaponsmiths have found that the springy, straight root of the cachava plant, native to the salt flats of the Ivory Plain, is the ideal raw material for crusher construction. While other materials can be used, the cachava root retains its flexibility for many weeks after harvest. While difficult to use in individual combat, crushers can be employed behind a line of friendly troops to disrupt the enemy.

Proficient use: The wielder must spend one uninterrupted round planting the end of his crusher in the ground and beginning the whipping motion. After that round, the wielder picks a "danger space," a circle 2' in diameter centered 10' directly ahead of the weapon. There is a corresponding danger space of equal size 10' directly behind the wielder. Any creature that enters either danger space suffers up to six total attacks in the round. To

retain his crusher, the wielder must have another uninterrupted round to stop its motion and pull the weapon from the ground.

Specialized use: A specialized wielder can use his crusher more effectively by changing its direction of swing more quickly. The danger space becomes a circle with a radius of 10' centered on him and one foot both inside and outside that circle. The wielder can pick any six targets within that danger space to attack each round.

Datchi club

Cost: 12 gp

Weight: 10

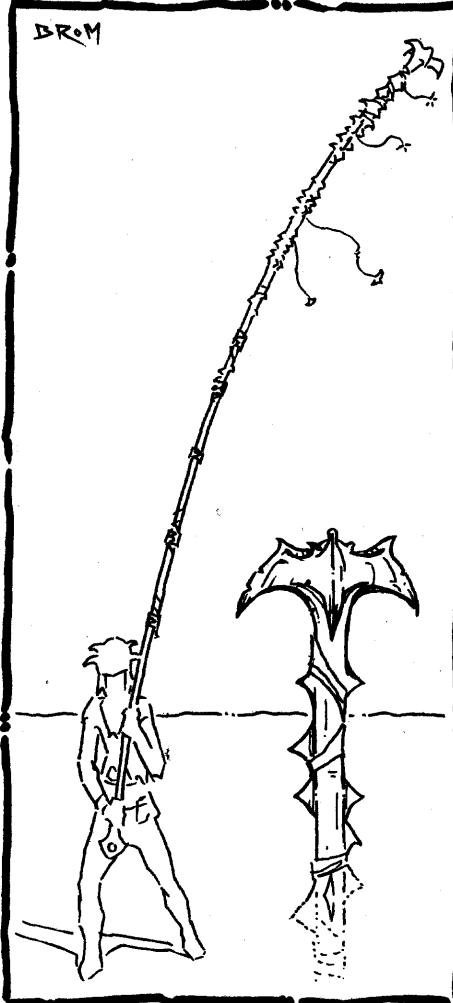
Size: L

Type: B

Speed Factor: 4

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d4

The datchi club is a specialized arena weapon, favored among more ruthless crowds because of the horrible wounds it can inflict. The head of the club is 4'-5' long, attached to a wooden or bone handle 3' long. The head is made of porous material, either insect hive or dried roots, and is incredibly light. It is then embedded with dozens of razor points. The razors can be metallic but are more often fashioned from teeth and claws. The handle is very solid, allowing the wielder to grip the base for greater range or to spread his



grip to enhance his leverage.

Proficient use: A datchi-club wielder who is proficient with his weapon can wield it effectively in combat, but receives no special benefits. As light as it is, the datchi club has a good speed factor, making it one of the quickest weapons of its size anywhere on Athas.

Specialized use: The specialized datchi-club wielder can inflict greater damage by spinning the weapon along its long axis during combat. Spinning the datchi club requires great forearm strength—a character can only do so for a number of rounds equal to his strength score per day. Beyond normal damage done, an additional 1d3 hp damage is inflicted while the datchi club is spinning.

Dragon's paw

Cost: 15 gp

Weight: 9

Size: L

Type: P

Speed Factor: 8

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d6 +1

The dragon's paw is a multibladed weapon popular among the arena masters of Urik and Tyr. The weapon has two blades, made from any material, one at each end of a 5'-6' wooden shaft. Around the center is a bar or basket that both protects the hand and holds another blade jutting perpendicular to the central shaft. This

blade is called the forward blade, while the others are called the outer blades.

Proficient use: A character familiar with the dragon's paw can cause more damage with the central blade by using the central shaft for leverage. If the wielder makes a successful dexterity check on 1d20 after the successful attack roll, he can inflict an additional 1d4 hp damage using the forward blade.

Specialized use: A warrior specialized in the use of the dragon's paw can sometimes use the outer blades to ward off opponents while using the forward blade to its full effectiveness. If attacking one opponent with the forward blade, and if there is a target within reach of either outer blade, the warrior can make one more attack per round per blade. These outer blade attacks have no attack roll penalty but inflicts only 1d2 hp damage.

Gouge

Cost: 6 gp

Weight: 12

Size: L

Type: P/S

Speed Factor: 8

Damage S-M/L: 1d8/1d10

The shoulder-strapped gouge is a specialized infantry weapon perfected for the slave armies of the Shadow King of Nibenay. It is a weapon that can inflict significant damage against an opponent and is

unlikely to be dropped in the event of a rout. The gouge itself has a wide bone, obsidian, or chitin blade mounted onto a 3'-long wooden shaft. A smaller handle protrudes from a forward position on the main shaft, while the rear of the shaft has a wide grip used to drive the weapon home. The shoulder strap is made of leather or cloth, and it sometimes is expanded to a complete harness around the neck and shoulders. The weapon can be easily turned over to accommodate a left-handed wielder.

Proficient use: A gouge wielder who is familiar with his weapon can use the handles to inflict greater damage on subsequent rounds of contact. After a first round of combat in which the wielder makes a successful attack against an opponent, he can announce his intention to gouge on the subsequent round. If, in that subsequent round, the wielder has a better initiative roll than his opponent, he automatically hits again, gouging the weapon into the opponent and inflicting +2 on his damage roll. If, however, the opponent wins initiative, he manages to avoid the gouge attack; the wielder can make a normal attack but at a -4 penalty to his attack roll for having instead prepared to gouge. The wielder of the gouge must declare his intent before initiative dice are rolled.

Specialized use: In addition to the gouge attack, a specialized wielder can spin his entire body with his gouge to inflict greater damage with a normal attack. The wielder suffers a -2 penalty to his attack roll but inflicts double damage due to his increased momentum on a successful attack. A specialized wielder can elect to gouge or spin again in the round following a successful spin attack.

Master's whip

Cost: 6 gp

Weight: 3

Size: M

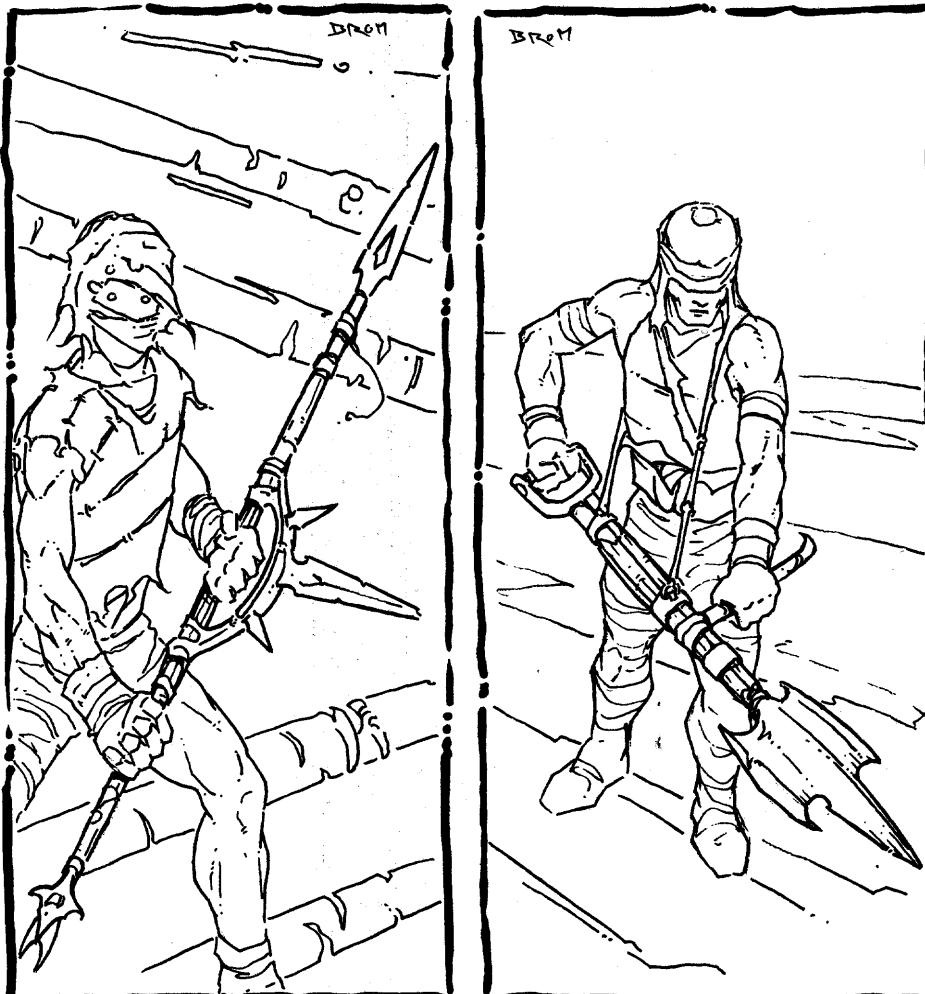
Type: P

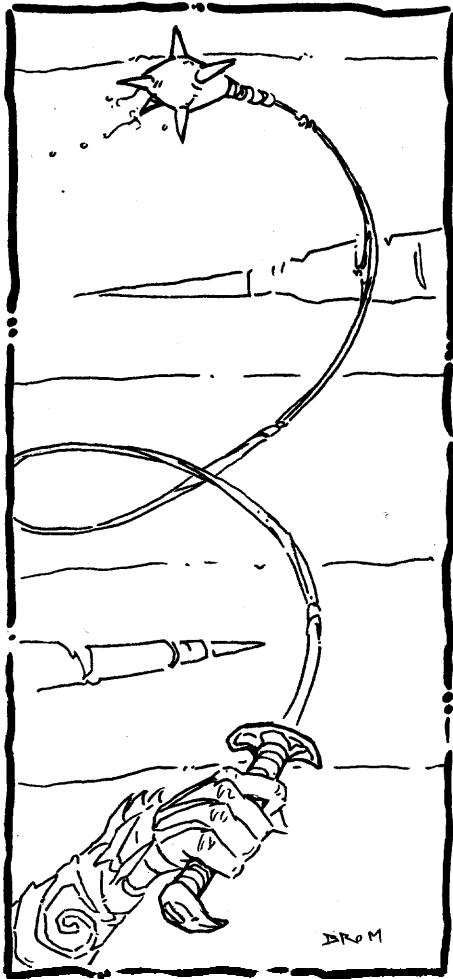
Speed Factor: 8

Damage S-M/L: 1d3/1d2

The master's whip is a favorite weapon among task masters and arena guards across Athas. The handle is usually carved from bone or ivory, then inlaid with decorative elements appropriate to the rank of the wielder. The whip itself is fashioned from leather or, for those that can afford the 15 gp additional cost, giant's hair. What sets the master's whip apart from the normal varieties is its barbed head. The head sports five separate hollow-tipped barbs, one at the end and four others spread out to the sides. The barbed head is most easily carved from bone, but wood also can be used.

Proficient use: Once a wielder is familiar with his master's whip, he can apply poisons to the hollow-tipped barbs and use them effectively against an opponent. Separate poisons may be applied to each of the five barbs, though only inject-





ed or contact poisons can have an effect on the target creature. On each successful hit with the master's whip, the wielder must roll 1d6 to determine which barb struck the victim; 1-4 indicates that one of the side barbs struck home, while a roll of 5 or 6 indicates that the end barb hit the mark. Once "applied" by the master's whip, the poison takes effect as described in the *DMG*.

Specialized use: A master's-whip specialist can choose which barb strikes the target, but he must announce that choice before the attack roll is made.

Tortoise blades

Cost: 9 gp

Weight: 5

Size: M

Type: P/S

Speed Factor: 5

Damage S-M/L: 1d6/1d6 + 1

Tortoise blades are most often made from their namesake creatures, but they can be carved from bone, chitin, or even stiffened leather. The blade is mounted to the underside of the protective shell permanently—it is the material of the blade that affects its performance in combat. Once strapped to the forearm, a tortoise blade counts as one point toward a piecemeal armor rating (*DARK SUN* Rules Book, page 72). A warrior with one on each arm and with no other armor would have AC 8.



Proficient use: A proficient tortoise-blade wielder can parry more effectively than with normal weapons. When parrying, the character gains an additional point of AC benefit per tortoise blade worn. To continue the previous example, if the warrior were 6th level, he would gain a +4 bonus plus an additional +2 bonus for the tortoise blades, giving him a parrying AC 2.

Specialized use: In addition to the proficient use benefits, a specialized wielder can use two tortoise blades without the normal two-weapon penalties. The specialized fighter suffers no penalty to his attack roll with the first tortoise blade, and only suffers a -2 penalty with the second.

Weighted pike

Cost: 6 gp

Weight: 15

Size: L

Type: P/B

Speed Factor: 12

Damage S-M/L: 1d6 or 1d6/1d12 or 1d4

The weighted pike is an example of a combination weapon, merging the effectiveness of the pike with that of the mace. The 7'-8' shaft of the weighted pike is almost always made of strong wood (agafari, if possible, though these are usually double the price). The pike blade can be metal, but is more often of bone or fang. The weighted, spiked ball is often ceramic, baked right onto the end of the shaft with the glass or metal spikes in place. The



damage listed is for when the weapon is used as a pike or as a mace. A nonproficient user can only opt for one of these per round of combat.

Proficient use: A proficient wielder can freely change from mace to pike or back again with every attack, even if they occur in a single round. For example, a 10th-level warrior proficient with the weighted pike could attack once with the mace and once with the pike within the round. This assumes, of course, that the character can reposition himself slightly to bring the length of the weapon into play—enclosed spaces are as inconvenient for the weighted pike as they are for other polearm weapons.

Specialized use: In addition to the proficiency benefits, a warrior specialized in the weighted pike can swing the mace end using the length of the weapon for greater effectiveness. The warrior can only make one such attack per round, but a hit inflicts 3d6 hp damage regardless of target size.

Widow's knife

Cost: 5 gp

Weight: 4

Size: M

Type: P/S

Speed Factor: 3

Damage S-M/L: 1d4/1d4

ROF: 2/1

Range S/M/L: 1/2/3

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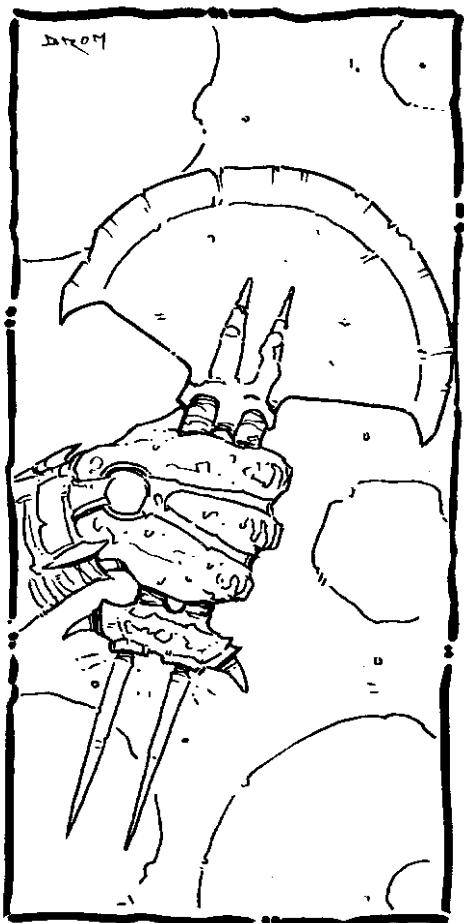
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The widow's knife takes its name from the similar harvesting tool often used in the verdant belts by women who have lost their husbands and must work themselves. Finely balanced, the widow's knife is a favorite court weapon and arena specialty. The wide end is preferably fashioned of metal, but can be made of obsidian; bone and chitin are too light to balance the weapon. The handle is carved of wood or ivory, often inlaid with markings peculiar to the owner. Particularly ornate widow's knives can cost many hundreds of ceramics. Hidden within the handle are two spring-loaded prongs, activated by a thumb catch on the handle. Once sprung, the prongs require a full round to reposition. The damage value applies to either the blade or prong attack-for game purposes, they are identical. The widow's knife can be thrown as a missile weapon.

Proficient use: A character proficient with the widow's knife can use the spring action of the prongs to greater effectiveness. On a successful attack roll, the wielder can release the spring-loaded prongs to inflict an additional 1d3 hp damage. The wielder must announce his intention to fire the prongs prior to his attack roll, which are then released regardless of his success.

Specialized use: A specialized wielder can throw his widow's knife more effectively. First, he can hurl the blade to better

catch the air and increase its range; short, medium, and long ranges become 2, 4, and 6, respectively, for the specialized thrower. Second, the warrior can more easily make a called shot with a thrown widow's knife, gaining a +4 bonus on such attacks regardless of range. Ω



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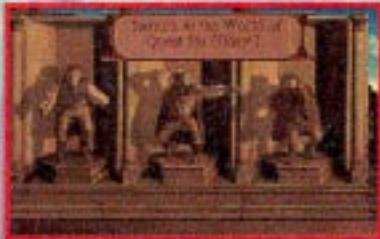
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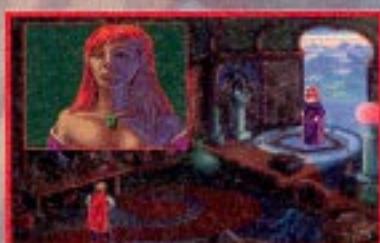
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Deadly beasts of burden for DARK SUN™ campaigns

Athas is a world powered by muscle. The magic of the sorcerer-kings is unmatched, but access to that magic is jealously guarded; to violate the sorcerer-kings' edicts means death. Psionics are pervasive, but most disciplines have no application to physical labor. Thus, the common Athasian has nothing to survive the rigors of his harsh existence but a primitive technology and his own brute strength—or the strength of his animals.

All Athasian races have adopted animal power in one form or another. Even the elves, who scoff at those who actually ride

rather than run, use crodlu and other beasts to pull their wagons. Beasts of burden are an entrenched element of all Athasian cultures, and the teamster holds respect across the deserts.

Fortunately for the demihumans of Athas, their world offers a menagerie of animals suited to burdensome tasks. Great lizards like mekillots and inix, insectoid kanks, and ostrichlike crodlu all have their niches, serving most purposes adequately. But there are a number of other animals that are more specialized, either in size and strength or in abilities or habitat.



Baazrag

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Stony barrens
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1 or 4-40
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	18
HIT DICE:	1
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-3
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Swarm, gnawing
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (2' long)
MORALE:	Unsteady (5-7)
XP VALUE:	65
PSIONICS:	Nil

Ferreted away in the broken crags and tiny caves of the barrens is the timid baazrag—timid, that is, until the pack has been angered.

Individually, a baazrag is an unimpressive creature. No more than 2' long, it is one of the smallest omnivorous animals in the stony barren regions. The baazrag's face is protected from above by a natural bone covering that reaches down on either side of the head and across the nose, with holes for the creature's nostrils and eyes. The mouth and lower jaw are left unprotected below the bony covering. The baazrag's humped back is covered with a hard, natural armor that protects the animal as a whole, especially the fluid storage sack just beneath the shell, vital to the animal's long-term survival. Its four legs are comparatively frail but adequate for their purpose; the baazrag merely darts around its rocky home seeking shelter against predators, not outrunning them on the plains. The animal's tail is 4"-5" long; while it can be used to slap tiny insects and rodents, it is no threat to larger animals as a weapon. Baazrags vary greatly in coloration, which changes with age. A baazrag is born at its darkest color: reddish-brown, green, even yellow or orange. As the animal grows, the color fades from its original richness until it turns a pale, sandy gray in old age.

Baazrags have a complicated language of squeals and chirps to attract mates and warn the pack of danger. Other creatures can communicate with them using psionics or magic.

Combat: If found alone, a baazrag attempts to flee rather than fight, even against creatures roughly its size. Most baazrags don't wander far from their home, a hole just big enough for itself in a rocky bastion no more than three rounds of movement distant. Once inside its home of stone, it is well protected from physical attacks.

A baazrag can only attack with its bite (1-3 hp damage). If a baazrag achieves a successful bite attack against the same target in two consecutive rounds, then it has gnawed the target's flesh. When a baazrag gnaws, glands behind its jaw release a mild toxin that greatly slows natural healing throughout the victim's body. After being gnawed by a baazrag, a victim will heal at one fifth the normal rate; this applies to all current damage. For example, a fighter with 35 hp suffers 15 hp damage from previous combat, then gets gnawed by a baazrag that inflicts 5 more hp damage. Normally, it would take the fighter 20 days of rest to heal his damage, but the gnaw attack extends that to 100 days of rest. Magical healing negates the toxin, as does a neutralize poison spell.

If an attacker cannot kill all the baazrags he originally encountered in the first five rounds, the pack swarms the area. On the sixth and subsequent rounds of combat, an additional 2-16 baazrags ar-



rive to attack. This lasts until the attackers have been killed or driven off, or until the pack has sustained more than 100 casualties, in which case the baazrags flee.

Habitat/Society: Baazrag packs are very loosely knit and band together only in defense of their territory. Individuals do not cooperate in hunting or gathering of food.

Noble families of Tyr and Balic began domestication of baazrags centuries ago to rid their household of annoying insects and pests. Since then, some have organized teams of baazrags to pull wagons. Every baazrag can pull 50 lbs. of wagon and cargo. A wagon that weighs 100 lbs., loaded with 500 lbs. of materials, requires a 12-baazrag team to pull it, for a movement rate of 9. Double that number raises the movement rate to 15, the maximum speed for any team of baazrags.

Other baazrags are specially trained to hunt unwanted pests around homes or in sewers and cisterns. Though not adapted to it naturally, a baazrag can be taught to swim. The templars of Tyr have a special service branch with several dozen such baazrags, dispatched upon demand to infested sections of the high bureaus.

Ecology: Baazrag females bear live young in litters of 2-6 (2d3). The young live with the mother in her home until they reach adulthood (about eight weeks), at which time they move out into the stony barrens to find homes of their own.

A baazrag can be slain and eaten. Each animal has 25 lbs. of edible meat. The fluid sack beneath the armor shell on its back contains 1-4 pints of water, but this is tainted by the same toxin that prevents normal healing after a gnaw attack. The water can be purified by a purify food and water spell or by a neutralize poison spell. Failure to purify the sack water makes the character sick for 1-6 hours.

Wild baazrag can be captured and sold in various city-states as pets or team animals. An undamaged baazrag fetches 10 cp in the marketplaces of the Tyr region.

Crodlu, Heavy

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sandy wastes, stony barrens
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Herd
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Herbivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1-6
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	18
HIT DICE:	6+6
THAC0:	13
NO. OF ATTACKS:	5
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-10/1-6/1-6/1-8/1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Ram
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (12' tall)
MORALE:	Average (8-10)
XP VALUE:	2,000
PSIONICS:	Nil

The heavy crodlu is a mammoth riding beast, bred in the cities for its incredible strength. It is used in groups for pulling large wagons and individually as a war mount. Many heavy crodlu have escaped into the wilderness, where they have integrated with wild crodlu herds.

Like its lighter counterpart, the heavy crodlu is a bipedal lizard. Its hind legs are thick and broad to support itself and a considerable load even on loose sand or gravel. The forelimbs are long but not especially strong. The claws are naturally sharp but are often filed to points or even shod with glass or metal blades for battle. The bony plates on top of its head give the beast greater protection there, and let the head be used for a ramming attack. The heavy crodlu's back, the back of its neck, and the top of its head and face are covered with thick scales, while its underbelly and throat have softer, leathery scales. Heavy crodlu can be any of a variety of colors, from light brown and sandy yellow to deep green approaching black. Generally, the harder scales are a darker color than the softer ones. Heavy crodlu have longer tongues than their brethren, and they have an unfortunate tendency to drool (a terribly waste of liquids, some say).

The heavy crodlu communicates with other crodlus with snorts that convey very basic concepts. More intelligent creatures can communicate with them through magic or psionics.

Combat: In individual combat, a heavy crodlu can make five separate attacks: one bite, two foreclaws, and two hindclaws. When carrying a rider or pulling a load, the heavy crodlu cannot bring its hindclaws into play. A bite inflicts 1-10 hp damage; foreclaws inflict 1-6 hp damage each; and the powerful hindclaws can inflict 1-8 hp damage each.

The heavy crodlu is also capable of a powerful ram attack. A heavy crodlu can ram when alone or when carrying a rider, but not when pulling a load. The animal cannot make any other attacks in the round it makes a ram attack. To initiate a ram attack, the intended target must be at least 60' distant at the start of the round; if not, the ram cannot be initiated. The heavy crodlu must be able to run directly at its target without obstruction. On a successful attack, the target suffers 3-24 hp damage as the heavy crodlu slams into it with the bony plates of its head. If the heavy crodlu fails its attack roll, it continues moving in a straight line for its full movement. If it subsequently runs into an immovable object, such as a rock outcropping or wall, the heavy crodlu itself suffers 1-10 hp damage. Once the initial target is missed, the heavy crodlu cannot redirect its ram attack against another target, even if the latter lies in the path of the heavy crodlu's movement.

Heavy crodlu specially prepared for combat may have bladed foreclaws or armor. Bladed foreclaws increase the damage by one point (1d6 + 1). Some riders have even had the blades enchanted or blessed to enhance their mounts' combat effectiveness. Heavy crodlu armor comes in three varieties: cloth, partial leather, and full leather. Cloth armor weighs effectively nothing, costs 20 cp, and gives the animal AC 3. Partial leather armor is stiffened, covering the face, neck, throat, and sides,



weighs 30 lbs., costs 55 cp, and gives the animal AC 2. Full leather armor is reinforced with bone and bits of metal, covering the face, neck, throat, forelimbs, sides, flanks, and belly; it weighs 100 lbs., costs 130 cp, and gives the animal AC 1.

Habitat/Society: Domestic heavy crodlu can be found in cities and on caravan routes. Special pens, maintained for crossbreeding to continue the line, are owned by noble families and merchant houses, even by the sorcerer-kings themselves. Heavy crodlu can be teamed with standard crodlu, but the different breeds have a tendency to dislike each other, sometimes turning on one another in territorial struggle at the most awkward times. In battle formations, units of heavy crodlu cavalry must at times be separated from normal crodlu; many armies with both keep them separated as matter of course.

Many heavy crodlu have escaped captivity and returned to the wild, either running off from caravans or slipping away riderless after a large battle. Heavy crodlu seek out herds of standard crodlu, where their great size affords them leadership. They seek out their brethren because of two overriding instincts: the herd mentality, and the need to mate.

Ecology: Heavy crodlu cross with standard crodlu and bear smaller offspring. After a couple of generations, the strength of the heavy crodlu ancestry is insignificant within the herd.

Heavy crodlu can carry up to 600 lbs. of passengers, cargo, or armor. Their movement rate depends on their present load:

Weight carried	Maximum movement
0-240 lbs.	18
241-360 lbs.	12
361-450 lbs.	8
451-600 lbs.	6
601+ lbs.	0 *

* Heavy crodlu refuse to move if loaded down with more than 600 lbs.

Drik

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Rocky badlands
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Family
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-4
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	6
HIT DICE:	16-+6
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-16/2-20
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Ram
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	G (35' long)
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	11,000
PSIONICS:	Nil

Driks are mammoth herd lizards that roam a very limited range in the rocky badlands around Black Waters. The beast masters of both Urik and Raam have all but depleted the wild driks' numbers, capturing young driks to serve in their armies.

A drik is an incredibly powerful animal, built low to the ground and covered with a thick, horny shell. The shell grows and hardens when the animal reaches full size, stretching from the front shoulders just behind the head all the way back to its rump; the shell is made of bone and a special secreted resin. The beast's head is enormous, with two black eyes and a mouth that could swallow a human whole. Jagged tusks protrude menacingly from its jaw, formidable weapons against other creatures. The drik's four legs are thick and stubby, able to support its own incredible weight even on loose sand. Each foot has four huge claws. Most driks have deep brown scales, though some are light brown or yellow. The resin shell is always dark gray spotted with bone white.

Driks communicate with each other through grunts and bellows. More intelligent creatures must use psionics or magic to communicate with a drik.

Combat: The drik's short legs and great weight make it a ponderous beast, but it can still handle itself in combat quite well. The animal's primary weapon is its bite, which inflicts 2-16 hp damage. A drik's head and neck are actually quite agile when held away from the resin shell; a casual observer may fall victim to the drik's seemingly unnatural quickness and reach.

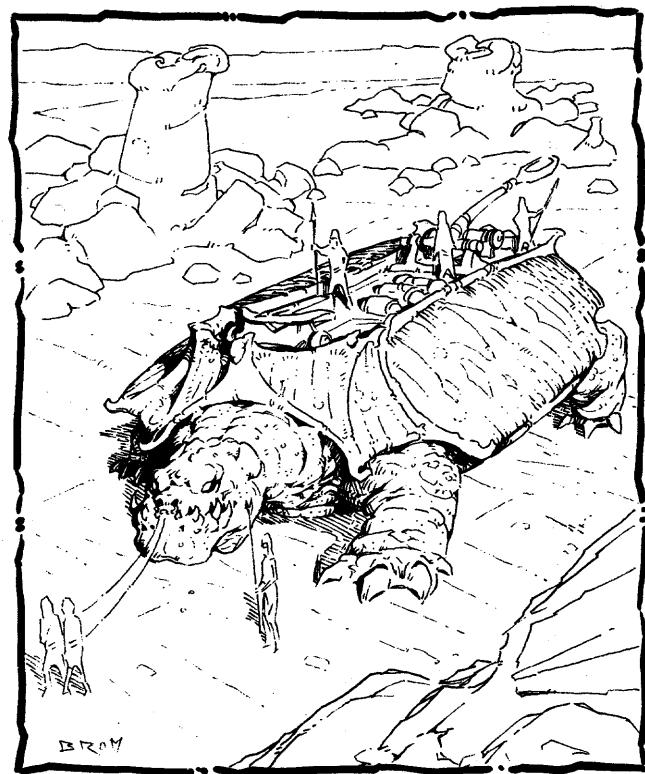
A drik can also attack with its clawed forelegs. However, the animal needs at least three of its legs to maintain balance and carry its own weight, so it can attack with only one foreleg at a time, inflicting 2-20 hp crushing and slashing damage.

Driks use a ram attack against each other or other large, slow-moving objects. A drik can initiate a ram attack if it has at least 30' between it and its target, and provided the target is gargantuan in size (25' or more) and doesn't move more than 60' per round itself. On a successful attack roll, the drik's ram attack inflicts 2-24 hp damage. The drik's ram can also be directed against structures. In this case, no attack roll is necessary, and the ram inflicts damage according to the BATTLESYSTEM™ game rules:

AD when used against:

Hits	Stone	Metal	Wood
Drik ram 6/18	4	6	10

A drik will not normally ram anything but another drik that is invading its territory. It will only ram structures or other creatures



if coaxed to do so by its handler.

Habitat/Society: Wild driks live in small family units dominated by a single female. Other adult females are not welcome within a family. They generally eat the grasses and shrubs of the badlands or the slower animals they can catch, and they drink out of the Black Waters, making it fairly easy for trappers to locate them. Driks are the only animals known that can ingest Hamanu's terrible poisons from the Black Waters and survive.

In captivity, driks are ideal animals for siege combat. Their natural ram attack is quite valuable, as are their great size and natural protection. Some driks are used to pull massive siege towers or wagons, but often they are instead used as individual, mobile weapons' platforms.

The drik's resin shell can be melted and partially reshaped. Workmen with torches can flatten the surface of the shell to more readily accept ballistae and catapults. Raamese engineers have perfected a technique whereby a wooden mold is built around an immobilized young drik as its shell is forming; though only one drik in three survives the process, the results can be spectacular.

Additional defenses can also be attached directly to the drik's outer shell. Wooden or bone barricades can be bolted directly to the shell without hindering the drik.

Ecology: A drik mother lays its eggs in the Black Waters once every three years. The young that hatch then find the nearest adult female (not necessarily its birth mother) and become part of that family. A drik reaches adulthood in two years and can then live to be 30 years old.

An adult drik itself weighs roughly five tons and can carry considerably more than that without slowing its movements. Up to 2,000 lbs. can be carried on its back before a drik simply refuses to move. A drik can pull up to 10 tons on wheels or drag five tons behind it.

Driks are known to be particularly foul tempered in captivity. In battle, each drik has its own psionic master who directs its activities. However, in the everyday life of a captive drik, trainers must deal with them without the benefit of psionicists; casualties among drik trainers are much higher than for the comparatively docile mekili-lots. No driks have been successfully bred in captivity.

Jalath'gak

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Scrub plains
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Swarm
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Constant
DIET:	Omnivore (nectar, blood)
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	3-30
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	9, Fl 24
HIT DICE:	8 + 8
THAC0:	11
NO. OF ATTACKS:	7
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-8/1-4/1-4/1-4/1-4/1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Blood drain
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Stink cloud
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	H (13' long)
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP VALUE:	4,000
PSIONICS:	Nil

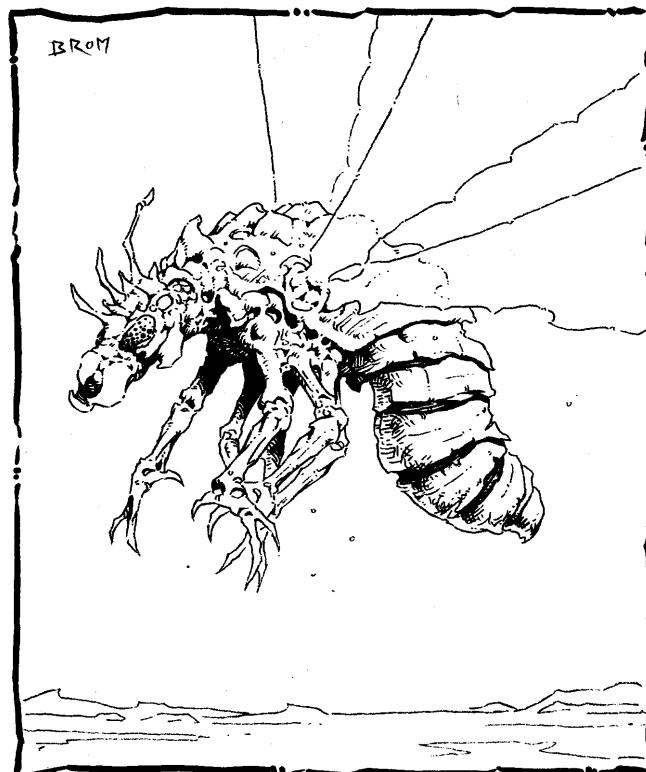
Also called swarmers and bloodwings by the demihumans of Athas, these giant insects are best known by their thri-kreen name, jalath'gak. First domesticated by thri-kreen in the scrub plains of the distant north, wild jalath'gak are the scourge of herdsmen anywhere in the tablelands.

A jalath'gak is an enormous winged insect, 13' long with a wingspan of nearly 20'. Like most insects, its body is divided into three sections: head, body, and thorax. The head is long and narrow so that it may fit into small areas to collect blood or nectar. The lateral pincers to either side of the jalath'gak's mouth are extremely powerful and hollow to draw nourishment. The long whiskers on the top of its head detect pheromones and other odors in the air; the whiskers are always moist and can be drawn back against the head during combat. The jalath'gak's body section is covered in a firm but brittle exoskeleton. The creature's six limbs are clustered beneath the body section, each sporting long, daggerlike talons. The thin wings also attach to the body section. When spread, the wings are transparent. When not in use, the wings fold close along the creature's side and over the thorax, trailing a few feet behind the creature. The jalath'gak's thorax is a storehouse of accumulated blood and nectar; when the insect has recently fed, the thorax becomes deep red or yellow and bulges almost to bursting. If the insect hasn't fed in a few weeks, the limp, gray thorax sags nearly empty. The jalath'gak's black and bright blue coloration make it quite distinctive.

Jalath'gak communicate with one another through pheromone discharges. Thri-kreen and other insects can make rudimentary communication with them using their own pheromones, but complex ideas cannot be so translated. Other intelligent creatures can communicate with jalath'gak through magic or psionics.

Combat: A jalath'gak can always attack with its pincers and all six limbs. In flight, it can hover and attack effectively, keeping its body between its opponent and its relatively fragile wings. When on the ground, a jalath'gak can rear back upon its thorax to bring all its legs into combat. Each leg inflicts 1-4 hp damage. Its deadly pincer inflicts 1-8 hp damage.

Once a jalath'gak has scored a successful pincer attack, it can drain the victim's blood. In all rounds following a successful pincer attack, the victim may attempt to break free by rolling a successful strength check (or, for creatures without a strength score, by saving vs. petrification). Every round that he does not break free, the jalath'gak causes an additional 2-12 hp blood-drain damage *and* it can still attack with all six limbs, though not with its pincers. Victims held by the pincers cannot make normal attacks. If the victim is killed due to blood-drain damage, the jalath'gak remains attached to the body, sucking the



corpse dry for another 1-3 rounds before moving on. A jalath'gak that has drained 50 hp blood damage in a single combat is gorged and refrains from further blood-drain attacks.

A jalath'gak reduced to its last 10 hp will attempt to escape using its stink cloud. The cloud is released from its mouth and covers a spherical area 30' in diameter directly to its front. Victims in the stink cloud must save vs. poison or become incapacitated with nausea for 1-6 rounds. A jalath'gak can release a stink cloud three times per day.

Habitat/Society: In the wild, jalath'gak live in enormous swarms. Unlike other insects, the swarm is not a cooperative effort, and no hive is built or maintained. Jalath'gak eggs are simply dropped from the ever-flying swarm into the hot desert sands; though only one egg in 1,000 hatches, this is sufficient to maintain the swarm's numbers.

Thri-kreen have mastered the domestication of the jalath'gak and use captured insects to pull heavy loads during migration. To better accommodate a wagon, the jalath'gak's thorax can be cut off. Without it, the insect lives for only 36 + 1d6 hours but functions normally during that time. In desperate situations, thri-kreen handlers cut the thoraxes off their jalath'gak to supplement dwindling supplies of food.

Attempts to harness the jalath'gak for its powers of flight have so far proven unsuccessful. In flight, the insect cannot manage much more weight than its own, and means to tie or harness them have so severely damaged the wings and limbs that such jalath'gak had to be destroyed.

Ecology: As mentioned earlier, a jalath'gak's thorax can provide nourishment. A single harvested thorax can be drained for 16 gallons of water. Thri-kreen and particularly hardy demihumans can also ingest the blood/nectar plasma; a single thorax contains enough for 32 common meals.

The jalath'gak's wings are quite valuable among the artists of the northern cities of Raam and Draj. Stretched over frames of bone or wood, images are painted on the clear medium and sold for remarkable prices. A set of undamaged jalath'gak wings can be sold for 50 cp in those cities.

Ruktoi

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sea of Silt, silt basins			
FREQUENCY:	Very rare			
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary			
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night			
DIET:	Carnivore			
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)			
TREASURE:	Nil			
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral			
NO. APPEARING:	1			
ARMOR CLASS:	3			
MOVEMENT:	9, Sw 15			
HIT DICE:	12			
THAC0:	9			
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1			
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-12			
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Smother			
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Cloud			
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil			
SIZE:	H (20' long)			
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)			
XP VALUE:	3,000			
PSIONIC SUMMARY:				
Level	Dis/Sci/Dev	Attack/Defense	Score	PSPs
1	1/0/1	-/-	-	Special

Psychokinesis— Sciences: nil; Devotions: Levitation.

The ruktoi is a solitary sentinel of the Silt Sea, able to paddle along its surface or lurk just beneath, patiently awaiting prey. Some ruktoi have been captured and either domesticated or controlled to ferry passengers or small cargoes across the endless silt basin.

As long as 20' from snout to tail, the ruktoi is a very flat, spread-out beast. Its head and torso are broad and thin, and the creature's smooth, gray skin is stretched tight across the bones of its skull, ribs, and spine. The ruktoi's powerful limbs each end in three long, splayed digits, webbed for use as paddles. The tail ends in a broad flap of skin and serves as an aid in movement and navigation across the surface of the Silt Sea. The ruktoi's light-gray skin makes it almost impossible to see against a silt background while stationary. Often the ruktoi hovers just below the surface, with only its snout and eyes exposed to the open air.

Ruktoi have no spoken language. They communicate with each other either through body motions or scent, which all ruktoi use to mark out their territory. More intelligent creatures can communicate with them through magic or psionics.

Combat: The ruktoi uses its silt-borne mobility to chase down less agile prey. The creature's broad body and paddled limbs, however, aren't enough to keep the animal afloat in the silt; the ruktoi also relies on an innate use of psionic Levitation. The ruktoi's command of psionics is only rudimentary, tapped subconsciously to help keep the animal near the surface where it can find food and air. As a subconscious activity, the ruktoi's psionic Levitation keeps the creature afloat even when it is unconscious. A ruktoi has no command over its Levitation power, and it can never rise above the surface of the silt. The ruktoi's listed swimming movement rate applies to silt only; a ruktoi cannot swim in water.

The ruktoi's primary weapon is its powerful bite. It can attack once per round with its bite, inflicting 1-12 hp damage.

The ruktoi can also use its powerful limbs to immobilize an opponent and smother it beneath the silt. Nearly all silt-dwelling creatures must breath to survive. The ruktoi cannot bite in the same round that it attempts to initiate a smothering attack. If the smothering attack roll is successful, the ruktoi has grappled the target firmly in its limbs, beneath its body below the surface. A character victim must make a successful bend bars/lift gates roll to free himself, allowable once per round. For other targets, the victim must attempt to save vs. petrification with a -3 penalty, allowable once per round. If the victim cannot free himself before he must breathe,



he is smothered.

While struggling to free himself from the grip of a ruktoi, a character can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to one-sixth his constitution score, rounded up. If attempting to hold his breath beyond this time, the character must roll a constitution check each round. The first check has no modifiers, but each subsequent check suffers a -2 cumulative penalty. Once a check is failed, the character must breath.

In situations where the ruktoi feels it cannot win in combat (usually after suffering half its total hit points in damage), it can kick up a cloud of silt to cover its escape. In a round that the ruktoi creates a cloud, its movement is only 9 instead of 15. However, all opponents must save vs. spells or be blinded and lose the ruktoi's direction of travel. Those who fail cannot pursue the ruktoi that round. If all opponents fail and they have no other means of tracking the animal's movements, the ruktoi escapes into the expanses of the Silt Sea.

Habitat/Society: Ruktoi are denizens of the Sea of Silt and the various silt basins near its shore. In the wild, they are solitary hunters that prey upon floaters and unsuspecting silt runners.

Ecology: Ruktoi associate with each other only to mate, and then on an infrequent and irregular basis. The female lays a dispersed pattern of 10-30 eggs that sink to the bottom of the silt. Those that survive the rigors of the silt hatch after six weeks and float to the surface. The young ruktoi reach adult size in just six weeks more.

Ruktoi are very difficult to domesticate and seldom stay domesticated forever, so owners more often control their beasts psionically. A single ruktoi can carry up to 1,000 lbs. on its back. While this weight does not slow the animal down, more than that will sink it. Many domesticated ruktoi have harnesses or howdahs built onto them, strapped and secured right to the beast's rib cage.

The merchant house Wavir in Balic has a pen of nearly 20 ruktoi used to ferry important cargoes up and down the Estuary of the Forked Tongue. However, since ruktoi travel is very hazardous, the house reserves their use for especially urgent or expendable cargoes.

Watroach (War Beetle)

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sandy wastes, salt flats
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Nest
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Insectivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	9
HIT DICE:	15+10
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	3-18/1-12/1-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Trample
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	G (30' long)
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	8,000
PSIONICS:	Nil

Watroaches are enormous nomadic insects of the desert tablelands. Each adult is actually a gigantic, mobile hive filled with a multitude of drones.

An adult wattoach is over 30' long, 20' wide, and 30' tall at the top of its central hive chamber. The three body sections—head, hive chamber, and thorax—are supported by six short legs extending from a central limb cluster. The head is very wide and low to the ground, the mouth ringed with sharp teeth and flanked by deadly pincers. The wattoach's neck and head agility is surprising, necessary for it to attack and consume its primary prey: large insects. The wattoach's tongue is very sticky, trapping tiny insects found beneath rocks or in crevices. It is also hollow, so the wattoach can suck small bugs directly into its gullet. The thorax is a storehouse of digested food and liquids for the adult wattoach, and is connected to the central hive chamber. Inside the honeycombed chamber are millions of infant, drone wattoaches, each less than 1" long, that serve the gestating proto-adult at the center of the hive. The wattoach's exoskeleton is black or deep purple.

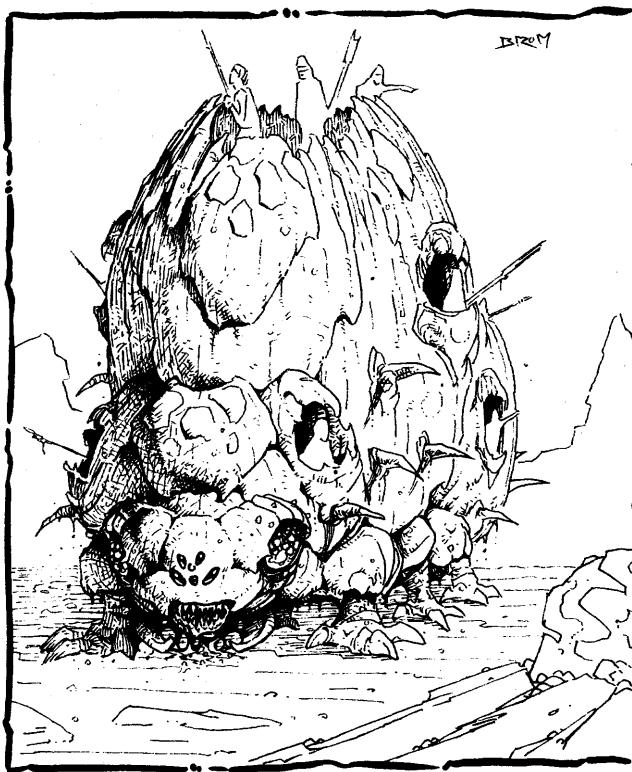
Watroaches have no language; adults in the wild take no notice of other adults they encounter. Other creatures can communicate with them using psionics or magic.

Combat: A wattoach can attack with its bite/pincers and with its two forelegs every round. The bite/pincers inflict 3-18 hp damage. Each foreleg can inflict 1-12 hp damage.

When fighting creatures that are clearly slower than itself, a wattoach may decide to trample its targets instead of making its normal attacks. When trampling attack, the wattoach must be able to move over the target with the entire length of its body in that round. When it does so, the target must save vs. petrification six times (once for each leg). Each time the save is failed, the victim suffers 2-16 hp damage. The wattoach can trample only one target per round.

Habitat/Society: Watroaches are solitary creatures in one sense and entire communities in another. Adults do not travel or hunt together, so it can be said that they are encountered only as individuals. However, in truth, each adult carries millions of drones and a proto-adult within its body, making it a complete walking community, self-sustaining and perpetuating.

Ecology: The adult wattoach lives only to feed, so that its hive chamber is fruitful when it dies. The drones bathe, feed, and otherwise maintain the proto-adult until such time as the adult gets too old to move. When the parent is immobilized and dying, the proto-



adult begins a rapid growth to full size. Within three days, the proto-adult ingests the remaining nutrients from its parent's thorax and most of the hive materials, literally eating its way out of the hive chamber. The proto-adult bursts out of its hive chamber nearly full grown, with its own chamber filled with drones and a new proto-adult inside. A few of the original drones go on to serve the new adult, but most perish in the open sun next to the carcass of the parent.

Undead Watroach

Watroaches are favorites among the insect necromancers in the armies of the sorcerer kings. Their great size makes them ideal creatures to be slain, modified, then animated to serve the wickedness of their masters.

Typically, an adult wattoach is sought out in the desert, surrounded, and killed. A psionic kill is preferred, leaving the corpse unmarred for future construction. Once taken back to a city (usually on a large wagon behind two or more mekillots or driks), the wattoach's carcass is prepared. The brain and guts are removed, as is much of the honeycombed hive material. The drones are smoked out over large fires, and the dormant proto-adult is discarded. Usually, the top of the hive chamber is then opened and a platform installed, and a variety of other individual weapons positions are cut into all of the three body sections. Once finished, the beast is raised from the dead by templar magic. A typical undead war wattoach has eight warriors in addition to its templar master.

In its undead form, the wattoach can move and fight just as in life. In a BATTLESYSTEM™ miniatures game, a unit of undead war wattoaches has these characteristics:

Undead War Watroach 2 stands; AD 12 + 8*6; AR 6; Hits 12; ML n/a; MV 9; Range 5"/10"/15" (bows from interior); causes horror, -3.

Undead war wattoaches are most commonly employed by the armies of Raam and Nibenay, though others have used them on occasion.

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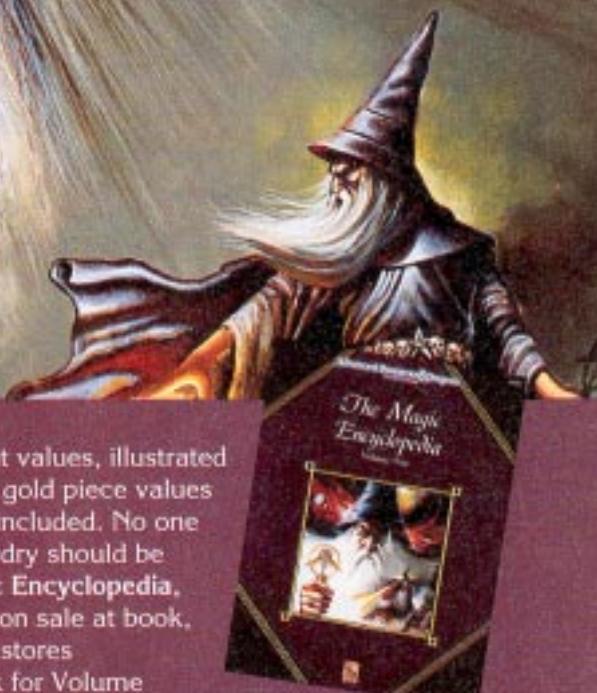
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Castles are the last refuge of the incompetent. At least, some AD&D® game players seem to think so. They've argued in DRAGON® Magazine's "Forum" that in a world equipped with *earthquake* and *disintegrate* spells, castles are completely impractical. Other writers said the same when the game began: Castles were indefensible, so people built trap-laden dungeon complexes instead.

It isn't true, though. Unless the world is full of magical power, most sieges won't include any high-powered wizardry. Even in a world of devastating magic and invisible spies, castles can hold their own—if the occupants just use a little creativity. Here's a list of tricks and tactics using little or no magic that can be used by characters staving off a siege or as standard security measures where possible.

1. *Don't keep it clean.* Nobody wants an invisible thief or mage using *spider-climb* sneaking over the walls to wreak havoc. Pour soot down the walls some windless day until they're coated (or at least streaked) with black dust. Anyone who tries climbing then will be noticeable in short order, as will their tracks across the soot-covered wall.

Inside the walls, soot in the courtyard and sawdust in the halls will make feet and footprints visible. Of course, the castle's everyday traffic will remove a lot of the dust, so it'll have to be replenished regularly or reserved for when a siege is underway.

2. *Keep the moat low.* Build it so that even if someone *water-walks* across the moat, they'll find themselves 10' below any usable entrances, with a sheer stretch of slick stone to climb to reach them. Stocking it with even moderately aggressive fish also can pay off, if the castle priest or druid uses *speak with animals* to explain things properly. ("If you ever notice some big creature moving on the surface of the moat, swim up and bite it, okay? It will taste good.")

3. *Lock the doors and bar the windows.* Every door, drawbridge, or portcullis leading outside should have double or triple locks, to make it harder for a *knock* spell or a *clime of opening* to get anyone inside. Three locks would force a wizard to stand there three minutes to *knock* that many times, not to mention how long it would take a thief to try to pick them all.

This also applies to doors leading from the central keep to the courtyard (if anyone *teleports*, flies, or sneaks over the walls). But don't use *wizard lock* unless it's an emergency or the wizard's the only one using the door (since it locks the door against everyone, not just the enemy).

Windows should be few, barred, and small to discourage anyone just flying in. If

Twenty Tricks for CASTLE DEFENSE

Mundane means to match magical menaces

by Fraser Sherman

Artwork by Eric Cornett

the castle wasn't built with those guidelines in mind, brick up any windows that aren't needed.

4. *Find strength in numbers.* In the movie *Beau Geste*, the embattled garrison of Fort Zindeneuf props the bodies of the dead along the battlements to conceal how many men they really have. In a magical world, this bluff can be enhanced with audible *glamer* or other illusion spells of moving men to keep the enemy in the dark about the price of a direct assault.

5. *Spread out the troops.* However many defenders the castle has, they should never be so close together that one area-effect spell like *death*, *sleep*, *chain lightning*, or *mass charm* could take all of them out at once. Making sure some higher-level warriors are mixed in with every group of 1st-level fighters also reduces the odds of them all falling victim to one spell.

6. *Keep watching the skies.* Anticastle types raise terrifying visions of airborne attacks—squadrions of pegasi, flying carpets, flying mages, even dragons—swooping over the castle walls and devastating the interior. Some castles will doubtless be roofed over with stone to prevent this; for those that aren't, even a small aerial assault (more likely than the winged hordes described above) poses a definite threat.

Spreading nets between walls and buildings will slow fliers down or stop them cold if they try feather falling in (you also can weave a few large nets and levitate them up when needed). Carefully cast *webs* (if the walls are close enough together to anchor them) will do even better. Remember, spells and some magic items (boots and *wings of flying*, for example)

have time limits (in the case of *feather-falling*, a very short one), so the longer the attackers can be kept in the air, the greater their risk.

The risk also goes up if the defenders cast *dispel magic*; against a squadron of spell-powered fliers, the effects can be devastatingly lethal.

For mounted attacks, a *stinking cloud* or smoke pots should be quite effective: Humans may understand why they have to go through that nasty, foul-smelling stuff, but flying steeds will be much less willing (and neither mount nor rider will be in great shape when they emerge).

7. *Keep watching the enemy.* If the enemy's camped outside the castle walls, it should be obvious where the commander's tent is—and an "obvious" location means *clairvoyance* and *clairaudience* can be used to learn the enemy's plans. They also can be used to check for sappers digging tunnels under the castle walls, or to check one side of the castle while the caster's standing on the far side.

8. *Talk to the animals.* Use *speak with animals* as much as possible. Tell the animals inside the walls, be they dogs, horses, or ducks, that if anyone walks by they can sense but not see, or if someone appears out of thin air, to bark, whinny, or quack their heads off.

If there's a trained falcon—or even a wild hawk—around, convince it to fly over the enemy camp and report what it saw (to the limits of its understanding). Let the castle rats and mice know about those big, delicious food stores in the besiegers' camp. And for the truly tacky, encourage the neighboring crows to visit the besieging soldiers (crude, but it's guaranteed to

stifle their enthusiasm).

9. *Hire an assassin.* A high-level wizard or priest among the besiegers can do an awful lot of damage; having him taken out by stealth may be preferable to facing earth elementals, *earthquakes*, or *passwall* spells. This will, of course, require getting a message outside (by secret tunnel or carrier pigeon) unless the deal is made in advance. Good-aligned characters will doubtless balk at this idea, but it is an option.

10. *Keep some spares.* When building a castle, have the stonemasons cut more blocks than are needed. Then, if a high-level mage does *disintegrate* part of the wall or uses a *passwall* to get through it, the stones can be *levitated* and carried across the courtyard to fill the gaps.

11. *Store some spells.* While building a castle, set some funds aside to give the guard captain a *ring of spell storing* and have the creator stuff it with *dispel magic* or silence spells. It'll give the guards a great edge against any unsuspecting wizard leading an assault, and can be recharged more easily than most magical items.

12. *Know the turf.* Fictional heroes are always escaping—or attacking—fortresses by finding secret passages the current owner doesn't know about ("Only the duke and I knew of this secret door. His treacherous brother has no idea of the castle's secrets"). Anyone occupying an existing castle should go over it inch by inch, even using a *wand of secret door and trap location* if need be. Secret passages can change the whole course of a siege, so make sure to find them.

13. *Make them sweat.* Don't underesti-

mate traditional castle design, even in a high-magic world. Gatehouses, concentric walls, and narrow corridors and stairwells (as described in DMGR2 *Castle Guide*) will challenge invaders even if they paralyze the night watch, *disintegrate* the portcullis and *teleport* inside the keep. High-level magic doesn't make siegework a cakewalk.

14. *Sow confusion.* If the enemy does fly, sneak, or *teleport* inside, don't give him a chance to do anything. *Walls of fog, darkness*, and illusion spells can keep the enemy from reaching or even finding their target, while the prepared guards on the battlements wait to shoot down whoever blunders out of the zone of confusion.

15. *Block that missile!* Low-level magic is remarkably effective against siege weaponry. Even a first-level *feather falling* spell will stop missiles; *levitation* can raise them high enough to miss the castle altogether.

Alternatively, strike at the siege machinery itself with spells like *warp wood* or *produce fire*. Or what if a catapult were reduced in size just as the boulder were being loaded on, and shattered from a weight it could no longer handle?

16. *Spread dissension.* Suppose a human leader with a contingent of dwarf mercenaries finds a "hidden" message from the castle—written in Dwarish? That might make him a little suspicious, no? What if a disguised defender slipped out and min-

gled with a half-orc platoon, spreading rumors ("The humans want us over the wall first because there's a basilisk inside—we're nothing but sword fodder to them"). Make the most of any class, nationality, or racial divisions among the enemy.

17. *Breed misery.* If defenders can sneak into the enemy camp, they can make the besiegers as miserable as possible without risking themselves in a fight (the crows described in #8 are a good example). Set *magic mouths* to scream at odd hours of the night. Use *putrefy food and drink*. Or stay within the castle and drench the enemy with repeated *cloudbursts*. Be nasty—but creative.

18. *Disrupt the assault.* Despite all their tricks, the defenders may still end up facing a horde of warriors out to overwhelm the castle by sheer weight of numbers. Clever use of spells, rather than brute force, may be the single stone that dams up the flood.

Defenders, after all, can sit tight; it's the attackers who have to move. Disrupt their charge with *darkness, fog clouds*, or illusions. *Taunt* them to make them break formation. Silence whoever's giving the orders. If the enemy leader is on one side of the castle, send a *spectral force* duplicate to the other side to call for a retreat. A little chaos can buy defenders time.

19. *Discourage wall-climbers.* If the

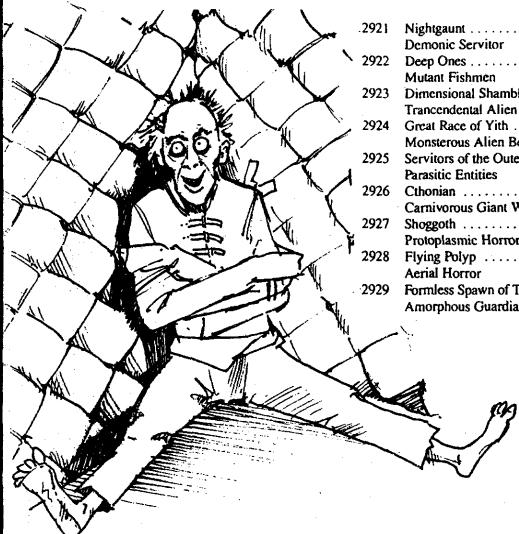
enemy starts climbing the castle walls, boiling oil is not the only way to stop them (though it isn't bad). *Grease* siege ladders. Cast *bind* spells to make ropes entangle their climbers. Use *warp wood* or *produce fire* on siege towers. *Levitate* stones, blow them over siege towers with a *gust of wind*, then drop them.

Use a *command* spell on the first person up the ladders ("descend" will cause problems for him and everyone below him). Get a pair of *slippers of spider climbing*; since the wearer can climb with his hands free, he has a big edge over anyone clinging to a rope or ladder, or relying on thief skills.

20. *Always expect the unexpected.* For every move, including the ones listed here, there's a counter-move; be prepared for it. Suppose the attackers use a *fog* spell themselves to blot out the view from the battlements? Could someone *jump* over the moat, then *levitate* up the wall while *invisible* without touching the soot on the walls?

A siege is a great opportunity for creative thinking, like a good comic-book battle where both heroes and villains improvise moves and countermoves with their super-powers. If both sides keep up their guard and keep their wits about them, the result—win, lose, or draw—can be a game to remember. Ω

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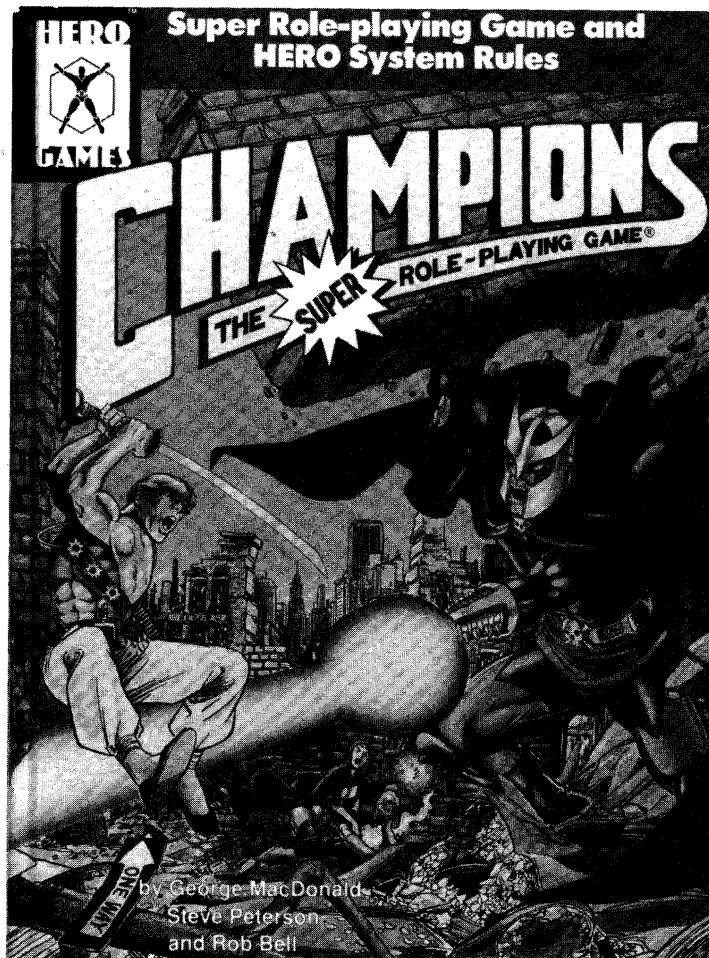
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CONVENTION CALENDAR

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines **must** be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing **must** include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) and telephone number(s) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

* indicates an Australian convention.

** indicates a Canadian convention.

† indicates a European convention.

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ANDCON '92, Sept. 11-13

OH

This gaming/PBM game convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Independence in Independence, Ohio. Guests include Darwin Bromley and Jim Landes. Events include RPGA™ Network games; role-playing, miniatures, and board games; a national PBM expo; railroad games; a dealers' room; and a luau. Registration: \$22.50 at the door. Write to: ANDCON '92, P.O. Box 142, Kent OH 44240-0003; or call: (216) 673-2117.

DEFCON IV, Sept. 11-13

NJ

This gaming convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Edison, N.J. Events include role-playing and miniatures games, and RPGA™ Network games. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$20 at the door. Single-day rates are available. Write to: DEFCON, 16 Grove St., Somerset NJ 08873; or call: (908) 249-0570 before 11 P.M. EST

HOBBYCON EAST '92, Sept. 11-13

NJ

This convention will be held at the Garden State Exhibit Center in Somerset, NJ. Events include exciting displays of radio-controlled cars, boats, and helicopters; an operating model-railroad layout; figure painting; and game demos. Registration: \$10. Write to: AMENCO, Suite 11, 43 W. Front St., Red Bank NJ 07701.

OPERATION GREEN FLAG '92

Sept. 12-13

PA

This BATTLETECH* -only convention will be held at the Embers in Carlisle, Pa. Events include single and lance competition, plus design-your-own-Mech and figure-painting contests. Registration: \$8-\$10. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070; or call: (717) 774-6676.

MIRACLECON '92.2, Sept. 19

OH

This convention will be held at the Liedertaal Club in Springfield, Ohio. Events include gaming, a dealers' area, an auction, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$6 at the door. Visa/Mastercard are accepted. Write to: Wolf's Lair Games, 601 W. Leffels Lane Ste. P, Springfield OH 45506; or call Tim: (513) 325-0059.

CAMELOT IV, Sept. 25-27

AL

This convention will be held at the Huntsville Hilton and Towers in Huntsville, Ala. Guests include Margaret Weis, Tracy Hickman, and Bob Giadrosich. Activities include role-playing and miniatures games, videos, a masquerade, computer room, and dealers. Registration: \$20 preregistered; \$25 at the door. Write to: H.A.G.A.R. P.O. Box 14242, Huntsville AL 35815-0242; or call: (205) 837-9036.

FANTASY FOLLIES I, Sept. 26-27

SD

This previously announced convention in Burke, S.D. has been cancelled.

RPG HIGH ADVENTURE, Sept. 26

VA

This convention will be held at the Moose Lodge in Mechanicsville, Va. Events include RPGA™ Network and open role-playing, board, historical, fantasy, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, anime, videos, food, and prizes. Registration: \$10 at the door. Send an SASE to: Tom Kube, 6405 Ewell Cir., Mechanicsville VA 23111; or call (804) 746-8375 evenings and weekends.

I-CON 3, Oct. 2-4

*

This SF/gaming convention will be held at the Harbour Towers Hotel in Victoria, B.C. Guests include Dave Duncan, Dr. John G. Cramer, and Betty Bigelow. Activities include two costume contests and RPGA™ Network and other gaming events with prizes. Registration fees vary with age, and special "gaming only" rates are available. Write to: I-CON 3, P.O. Box 30004, Saanich Centre Postal Outlet, #104-3995 Quadra St., Victoria, B.C., CANADA V8X 5E1; or call Mark evenings: (604) 595-1104.

ICON 17, Oct. 2-4

IA

This SF/gaming convention will be held at the Best Western Westfield Inn in Coralville, Iowa. Guests include Mercedes Lackey, Rex Bryant, Joe & Gay Haldeman, Rusty Havelin, Larry Dixon, Mickey Zucker Reichert, Glen Cook, and Roger E. Moore. Activities include gaming, panels, dealers, an art auction and print shop, a masquerade, videos, Old English dancing, falconry, and the Trans-Iowa Canal Company. Registration: \$25/weekend or \$15/day. Write to: ICON 17, P.O. Box 525, Iowa City IA 52244; or call John: (319) 377-3738, or Michelle: (319) 626-6962.

WORLD TITAN TOURNAMENT '92

Oct. 2-4

VA

This convention will be held at the Best Western Cavalier Inn in Charlottesville, Va. Events include continuous TITAN* games. Trophies will be awarded. Registration: \$9 preregistered; \$11 at the door. Write (and make checks payable to: Bill Scott, 2317 Barracks Rd., Charlottesville VA 22901; or call: (804) 293-9265.

HIGHLAND V, Oct. 3

TN

This convention will be held in the University Center of Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tenn. Activities include a con suite, dealers, art exhibition, computer/video games, and gaming. Registration: \$2 general admission. Write to: Alpha Psi Phi, Box 5226, Cookeville TN 38505.

PHANTASM '92, Oct. 3-4

*

This convention will be held at the Peterborough Public Library in Peterborough, Ontario. Guests include Ed Greenwood. Activities include dealers, RPGA™ Network events, and an art display. Registration: \$10 (Canadian) preregistered; \$15 (Canadian) at the door. Single-day rates are available. Write to: PHANTASM '92, 276 Parkhill Rd. W. (Rear), Peterborough ON, CANADA K9H 3H5; or call: (705) 748-0796.

TOLEDO GAMING CONVENTION X

Oct. 3-4

OH

This convention will be held at the University of Toledo, Scott Park campus. Events include over 150 games, with nonstop movies, demos, an auction, painting contests, and open gaming. Send an SASE to: TOLEDO GAMING CONVENTION X, c/o Mind Games, 2115 N. Reynolds Rd., Toledo OH 43615.

COSCON '92, Oct. 9-11**PA**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Beaver Falls, Pa. Guests include Jean Rabe. Activities include many RPGA™ Network events, dealers, a gaming auction, a miniatures-painting contest, and an anniversary gift for every registrant. Registration: \$15 until Sept. 30; \$20 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003; or call Dave: (412) 283-1159.

COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS 18**Oct. 9-11****NY**

This convention will be held at the Washington Inn in Albany, N.Y. Events include RPGA™ Network events, with role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, seminars, miniatures and board games, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration varies, going up after Sept. 15. Write to: COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS 18, Schenectady Wargamers Assoc., P.O. Box 9429, Schenectady NY 12309.

NECRONOMICON '92, Oct. 9-11**FL**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Tampa, Fla. Guests include James P. Hogan, Ray Aldridge, and Glen Cook. Activities include panels, an art show, dealers, a charity auction, a masquerade, an Ygor party, a trivia contest, and workshops. Registration: \$20/weekend or \$8/day. Write to: NECRONOMICON '92, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569; or call: (813) 677-6347.

QUAD CON '92, Oct. 9-11**IA**

This convention will be held at the Palmer Auditorium in Davenport, Iowa. Events include role-playing, miniatures, and historical games, with a silent auction, a miniatures-painting competition, dealers, and on-site food. Registration: \$9/weekend or \$4/day preregistered; \$12/weekend or \$6/day at the door. Games will cost \$2-3 each. Send a long SASE and two stamps to: QUAD CON '92, c/o Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Ave., Moline IL 61265; or call: (309) 762-5577 (no collect calls, please).

GAMEMASTER '92, Oct. 10**ID**

This convention will be held at the Student Union Building of Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. The guest of honor is Gary Thomas. Registration: \$5 before Oct. 7 (students with I.D.s: \$4). At-the-door rates will be slightly higher. Write to: Gamemaster's Guild, 3531 Sugar Creek Dr., Meridian ID 83642; or call: (208) 888-6851.

KETTERING GAME CONVENTION VII**Oct. 10-11****OH**

This convention will be held at the Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include fantasy role-playing, board, computer, miniatures, and RPGA™ Network game events, plus a game auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Wilwood Ave., Kettering OH 45429; or call: (513) 298-3224.

NUKE-CON 2, Oct. 10-11**NE**

This convention will be held at the American Legion South Omaha Post #331 in Omaha, Nebr. Guests include Stan West and Fred Gorham. Activities include role-playing and miniatures tournaments, as well as open gaming. Registration: \$5/day. Write to: Pat K. Wokurka, NUKE-CON 2, P.O. Box 1561, Bellevue NE 68005.

WHITEWATER GAMERS CONVENTION 3**Oct. 10-11****WI**

This convention will be held at the Campus Activities Center on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Registration: \$5/weekend, or \$3/day. Judges are welcome. Write to: Vince Reynolds, 1380 W. Main St., Apt. #111, Whitewater WI 53190; or call: (414)473-4206.

CIRCLE OUROBOROS '92, Oct. 16-18**MS**

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson's in Meridian, Miss. Guests include Steven Barnes and Robert Asprin. Activities include role-playing and miniatures games, game demos, and a movie room. Registration: \$20 preregistered; \$25 at the door. Write to: CIRCLE OUROBOROS, P.O. Box 492, Meridian MS 39302.

ENBICON IV, Oct. 16-18

*

This convention will be held at the Student Union Building on the campus of the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Guests include Margaret Weis. Activities include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, plus game auctions, dealers, seminars, and miniatures and art competitions. Registration: \$12 (Canadian). Write to: ENBICON, c/o UNB Student Union, Box 4400 UNB, Fredericton NB, CANADA E3B 5A3; or call James: (506) 459-5689.

NOVAG VII, Oct. 16-18**VA**

This convention will be held at the West Park Hotel in Leesburg, Va. Activities include role-playing and miniatures games, with raffles, dealers, and contests. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 at the door or \$6/day. Preregistered GMs will receive a discount. Write to: NOVAG,

P.O. Box 729, Sterling VA 20667; or call: (703) 450-6738.

SAINT'S CON '92, Oct. 17-18**MN**

This gaming convention will be held at the Atwood Center Ballroom, on the campus of St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minn. Events include role-playing, miniatures, and board games, with miniatures competition and tournaments. Registration: \$2. Door prizes will be awarded. Write to: SAINTS CON, c/o Joe Becker, 1404 12th St. SE, St. Cloud MN 56304; or call Joe: (612) 252-2116.

TACTICON '92, Oct. 17-18**CT**

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Stratford, Conn. Events include role-playing and miniatures games, with open gaming, dealers, movies, and a miniatures contest. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$20 at the door. Write to: TACTICON '92, c/o Jim Wiley, 100 Hoyt St., Stamford CT 06905; or call: (203) 969-2396.

WIZARDS' GATHERING III**Oct. 17-18****RI**

This convention will be held at the Days Hotel in Providence, R.I. Events include role-playing and miniatures games, with dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, a costume contest, awards, and a raffle. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$10/day before Oct. 3; \$25/weekend or \$15/day at the door. GMs are welcome. Write to: WIZARDS' GATHERING, c/o SMAGS, P.O. Box 6295, So. Sta., Fall River MA 02724; or call: (508) 324-4717.

WARP III, Oct. 23-25**OK**

This convention will be held at the Trade



Winds Central Inn in Tulsa, Okla. Guests include L. Neil Smith, Ron Dee, and Randy Farran. Activities include role-playing, miniatures, and board games, plus a costume contest, dealers, an art show and con suite, videos, music, parties, and open gaming. Registration: \$8 preregistered; \$14 at the door. Write to: WARP, 415 S. 66th E. Ave., Tulsa OK 74112.

DRAGON '92, Oct. 24

This SF&F convention will be held at the Student Union on the campus of University of Bristol in Bristol, U.K. Guests include David Gemmell, Diane Duane, Peter Morwood, and Rob Holdstock. Activities include panels, classic videos, gaming, and historical reenactments. Registration: £3 in advance. Write to: DRACON, 37 Cowper Rd., Bristol BS6 6NZ, ENGLAND; or call Anne or Andy: (+ 44) 0272-735935.

CON OF THE WEIRD & SUPERNATURAL Oct. 31-Nov. 1

PA

This convention, specializing in horror and mystery games, will be held at the Embers in Carlisle, Pa. Events include dealers, videos, a miniatures-painting contest, and over 30 gaming events. Registration: \$6-\$10. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070; or call: (717) 774-6676.

CON*STELLATION XI, Nov. 6-8

AL

This SF convention will be held at the Huntsville Hilton in Huntsville, Ala. Guests include Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Dean Wesley Smith, Michael Flynn, Stephen Hickman, and Mike Glicksohn. Registration: \$22. Send an SASE to: CON*STELLATION XI, c/o Scorpio, P.O. Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815-4857.

SHAUNCON V, Nov. 6-8

MO

This convention will be held at the Rodeway Inn in Kansas City, Mo. Events include many first-run RPGATM Network tournaments, with role-playing and board games, dealers, and contests. Dealers are welcome. Write to: SHAUNCON, c/o Role-playing Guild of Kansas City, P.O. Box 7457, Kansas City MO 64416; or call: (816) 455-5020.

LAGACON 15, Nov. 7-8

PA

This convention will be held at the Eagles' Club in Lebanon, Pa. Events include role-playing-game and board-game tournaments, dealers, and food vendors. GMs are welcome. Write to: Lebanon Area Gamers Assoc., 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon PA 17042; or call: (717) 274-8706.

ROCK-CON XX, Nov. 7-8

IL

This gaming convention will be held at Rockford Lutheran High School in Rockford, Ill. Guests include Darwin Bromley, James "Jim" Ward, John Olson, and Lou Zocchi. Activities include role-playing, board, war, sports, railroad, and family games, with open gaming, demos, many dealers, a silent auction, and tournaments. Registration: \$5. Write to: ROCK-CON, 14225 Hansberry Rd., Rockton IL 61072; or call: (815) 624-7227.

BATTLECON '92, Nov. 14-15

CA

This convention will be held at the Fabulous Inn on Hotel Circle in San Diego, Calif. Events include World War II board games, with other games and tournaments. Registration: \$16/weekend preregistered; \$20/weekend or \$10/day at the door. Dealers are welcome. Write to: Dan Huffman, c/o Trags Distributing, 3023 Hancock St., Suite C, San Diego CA 92110; or call: (619) 688-1156.

PENTACON VIII, Nov. 14-16

IN

This convention will be held at the Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, miniatures, and computer games, with miniatures-painting and costume contests, door prizes, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$10 preregistered. Write to: Steve & Linda Smith, 836 Himes, Huntington IN 46750; or call: (219) 356-4209.

PROVOCATION '92, Nov. 14-15

*

This convention will be held at the John F. Kennedy school in Montreal, Quebec. Events include gaming tournaments, round-table discussions, figure expos, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$20 (Canadian)/weekend or \$12 (Canadian)/day before Nov. 1. Write to: PROVOCATION, C.P. 63, succ. M., Montreal PQ, CANADA H1V 3L6; or call: (514) 596-0115.

DALLASCON '92, Nov. 20-22

TX

This convention will be held at the Le Baron Hotel in Dallas, Tex. There will be over 200 events for role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with a dealers' room, movies, seminars, and an auction. Write to: DALLASCON, P.O. Box 867623, Plano TX 75086.

SAGA I, Nov. 20-22

LA

This convention will be held at the Airport Sheraton Inn in Metairie, La. Events include organized and open gaming, a scavenger hunt, costume and miniatures contests, videos, a dance, and a dealers' room. Registration: \$10 preregistered before Nov. 1; \$15 at the door. Call Wargames & Fantasy: (504) 734-1953; or Richard: (504) 835-6505.

GROUND ZERO, Nov. 21-22

MD

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn-Chesapeake House in Aberdeen, Md. Events include board, role-playing, and miniatures games, with tournaments, dealers, and a game auction. Registration: \$9 before Sept. 31; \$12 at the door. Write to: GROUND ZERO, c/o The Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Rd., Bel Air MD 21014; or call: (410) 638-2400.

WARPCON '92, Nov. 21-22

MI

This convention will be held in Sangren Hall on the campus of Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich. Events include role-playing and miniatures games, with a miniatures contest and a movie room. Dealers and GMs are welcome. Registration: \$5/weekend or \$3/day. Write to: Western Area Role-players, Faunce 2040, Mailbox #47, Western Michigan Univ., Kalamazoo MI 49008; or call Jeff: (616) 387-9783, or Gail: (616) 387-0710.

COCOACON '92, Nov. 27-29

PA

This convention will be held at the Harrisburg Marriott in Harrisburg, Pa. Events include RPGATM Network events; role-playing, board, and miniatures games; a miniatures-painting contest; a dealers' area; and open gaming. Registration: \$9/weekend before Nov. 10; \$13/weekend at the door. Single-day rates vary. Write to: COCOACON, 210 S. Grant St., Palmyra PA 17078; or call evenings: (717) 838-9502, or (717) 838-9784.

GOBBLECON '92, Nov. 28

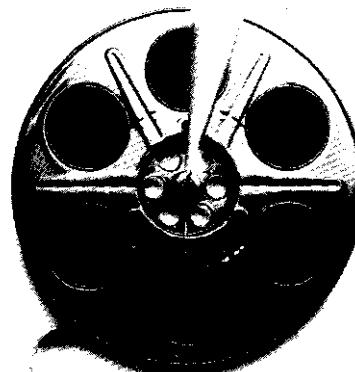
PA

This convention will be held at the Wind Gap Fire Hall in Bath, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with RPGATM Network games. Other activities include prizes for top players and a discount dealers' area. Food will be available on-site. Registration: \$7

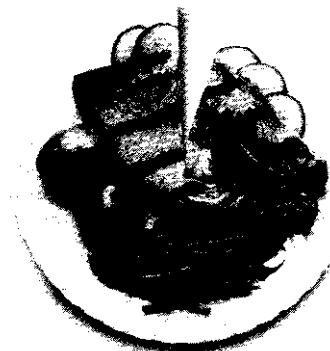
before Nov. 16; \$10 thereafter; partial-day rates available. Event tickets are \$1 each. Send a long SASE to: GOBBLECON, c/o 118 S. Broadway, Wind Gap PA 18091; or call Mike: (215) 863-5178. No collect calls, please.

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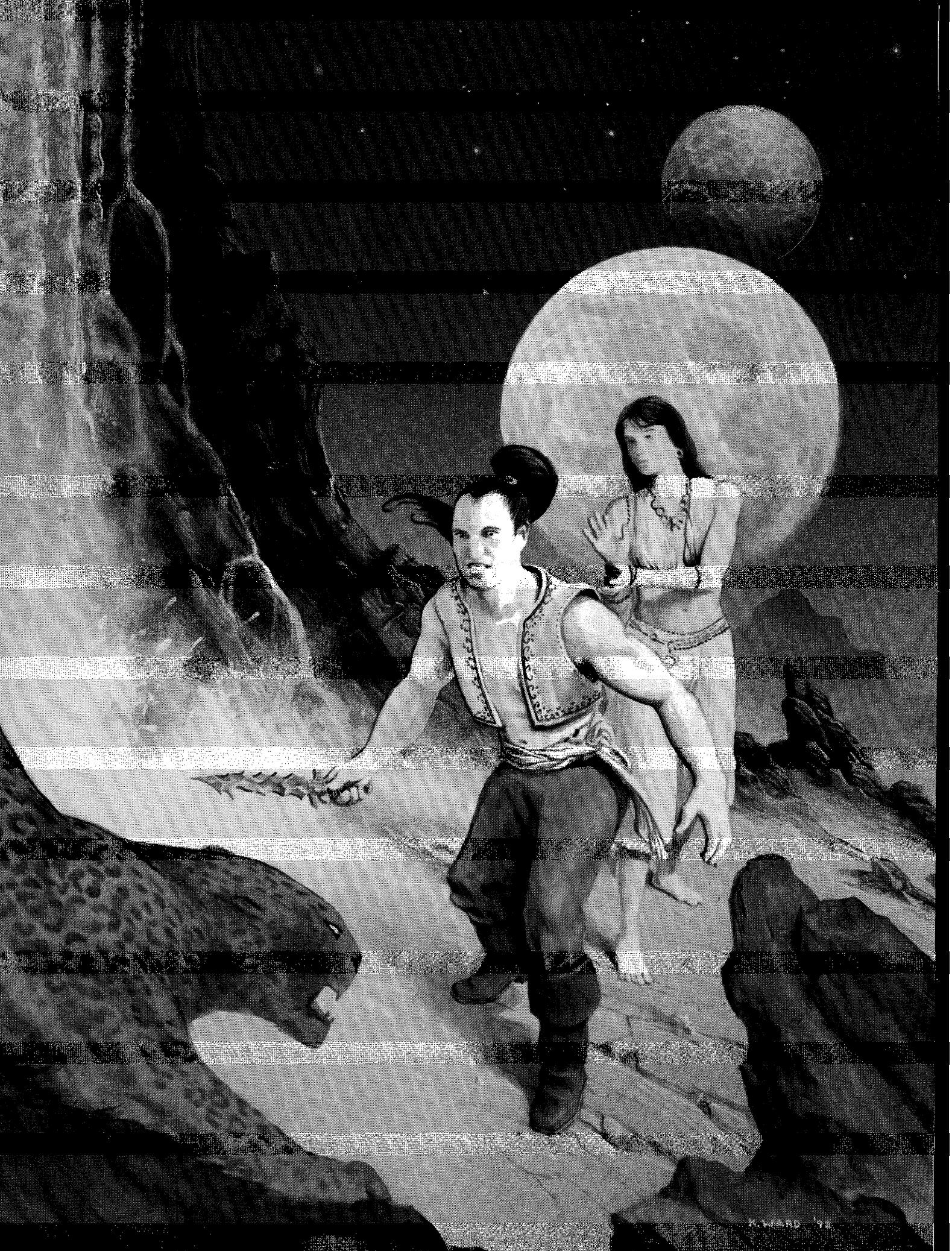
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O THE INITIATE: These pages merit strictest secrecy. Any beyond the Veil who read or capture them must suffer recompense at once.

This manuscript appears quite recent. Most students among the Alliances of Athas date it no earlier than the Year of Priest's Fury. Nonetheless, its melodramatic summary of the society's origin has already spread to all chapters throughout the region. The document has become the standard first instruction given to all who join the Veiled Alliance.

The document's florid style considerably embellishes historical events. It transforms history into myth by writing the founders' actions ever larger. Outlandish? Perhaps. But from this account even a cynical initiate can sense our society's compelling importance.

This copy consists of eleven birchbark sheets from the trees of the Crescent Forest, tied in strips of inix leather and probably inscribed at the learned scriptoria in the Shrine of the Winds in Raam. Needless to say, we know neither the author nor the original recipient.

Now, student, learn the secrets of the Veiled Alliance!

Noble Sir,

At your initiation you asked about the founding of our society. "What great wizard brought all this about? What traitor betrayed its existence to the sorcerer-kings?" you asked, and you wondered why we smiled. We had no time to expound upon the question—the guards attacked then, as you no doubt recall—and so my reply has had to wait.

The tale begins with Daclamitus, a man of sinister nature and dark look, of pursed lips and measuring gaze, cloying to superiors and cruel to underlings. The black robes of the templar bespoke his black heart. But I move ahead of my story.

Out of Darkness, Light

Many kings' ages past, Daclamitus rose high among the templars of Tyr. Even by that evil calling's standards, his cruelty and ambition were proverbial. His underlings knew Daclamitus as a cunning man, as evasive as a jarbo, hard to grasp as a handful of air. His endless devotion to self-advancement earned him the name "the Sleepless One." His zeal in tracking traitors soon brought the respect of the sorcerer-king, Kalak, who granted him nearly unlimited power as his senior adjutant.

Daclamitus's office let him indulge certain private ambitions, including an interest in ruins and objects of magic. Perhaps he hoped to obtain some device from ancient days that would let him rise farther—even to the black throne of Tyr.

It happened that a group of adventurous antiquarians, having studied ancient texts, set forth across the desert by unknown paths to search for the lost city of Kor. After many months, when they did not return to Tyr, Daclamitus claimed their homes and goods in the name of Kalak. But on a day blackened by the blowing sand, they returned from the wasteland bearing a strange helm.

Daclamitus ordered the weary travelers seized and imprisoned. But torture could not make them reveal the helm's powers, and they died professing their ignorance.

For a time the helm lay upon Daclamitus's desk. He sensed its magic but could not decipher its purpose. How

Water and Ashes

by Allen Varney

Illustrations by Kevin Ward

could he unlock its secrets?

At last desire for power overcame cowardice. Alone in his chambers, he put on the helm. As though a curtain had parted, he saw the evil of his life. A spellbinding vision showed how all his actions had made his heart small and petty, how he had stamped out people's impulses toward freedom, truth, and beauty. The ancient magic wrought upon him changed him so powerfully and painfully that he fell into a swoon lasting days.

When he woke, he felt reborn. He asked his servants to bring him the helm, but discovered that out of fear they had torn it from his head and melted it in a blacksmith's forge. He forgave them and resolved to begin a new life, redoubling his zeal in a high and worthy cause. But what Evils battered Athas like surging waves of dust on the Sea of Silt.

In the moment this image rose to his mind, Daclamitus saw the root of these troubles: the devastation that had blighted the world itself. The templar knew that the blight continued to this day, and he resolved to fight it. He would rid Athas of the wizards who had almost destroyed it!

But his political acuity had not left him. Daclamitus knew that doing this good work required craft and subtlety. If Kalak ever suspected his new nature, the Sleepless One would fall into a permanent sleep. Fortunately, his great abilities in the arts of the mind concealed his thoughts, and his skill in duplicity hid his actions. Yet his newfound emotions betrayed him.

The washerwomen and the stableboys spoke of the templar's new kindness, and the tale found its way to a skulking, obsequious young man, an ambitious junior templar named Antrifos. This shows that no matter to whom we speak, the templars hear. Antrifos began watching Daclamitus from secrecy.

In the following weeks Daclamitus persecuted wizards in a spirit of righteous vengeance. The mention of his name could make a mage turn pale with fear. Many of our calling fell to his wrath, but they did not die in vain. For as he took endless tortured confessions, the templar slowly began to suspect what no templar knew: that magic takes many forms and perhaps—just perhaps—could serve not death but life.

Finally Daclamitus heard of a beautiful mage-woman who dwelt "beyond shimmering water," a wizard of power and purity. He longed to capture her. The templar felt certain that her confession would teach him, at last, the truths of magic. But for months he heard no more about her, neither her name nor the meaning of this "shimmering water." So his persecution continued.

One night at his palatial home his guards brought him a drunken merchant, a caravan driver. The traveler told a story of a waterfall gleaming at night upon a distant peak, Rogal Tor. The merchant had spotted it for only an instant, when the two moons took a certain position and this wonder emerged flashing like a sheet of silver in the night.

Of course, the desert traders know seven dozen absurd legends like this. But something in the man's manner, perhaps his attitude of fear and suspicion, provoked the high templar's curiosity. Daclamitus called astronomers and geographers to his home, so that he could find this mystery by square and compass. His eagerness drew the

attention of Antrifos, who made discreet inquiries of a servant. The young man's informant told him, "The high templar seeks a waterfall in the desert. The sages place this miracle at Rogal Tor, which I know has no more water than a bone."

Antrifos thought, "My leader has learned of great power, or he has gone mad. Either way, I shall exploit his lunacy."

Meanwhile, Daclamitus arranged and set out with an expedition. They met great hardship in the wastes, but at last in the cold desert night they came to Rogal Tor. Sharp and clean as a nightmare beast's fang, it stood pale gray against the sky, outlined in stars.

Daclamitus scaled the peak alone, lest his troops' presence alert the wizard. High on the mountain, he saw the twin moons hanging low in the sky, like eyes glowing through dark fabric. Above him, a waterfall descended from the jagged summit to a crack in the dark volcanic rock. Moonlight made the water a beaded curtain, shimmering with light.

The templar paused, awed by its beauty. He had never seen so clear a night. Then in a lethal silence he climbed up to the crevasse. He whispered Kalak's name to silence spells that might sound an alarm. Then he stepped through.

As the curtain of cool water drenched and refreshed him, he entered a garden of green delight. Ferns flourished in each corner, grasses and sedge grew like a carpet, and spidery air plants limned every crag of the cavern wall. The pungent air closed in like a damp cloak. Light diffused through the long cave from no clear source.

The templar silently walked deeper into the cave. He had never seen so much green outside Kalak's gardens. There the plants grew in orderly array. This feverish growth, though attractive, struck him as—undisciplined.

He stopped in surprise. On a bed of green moss, surrounded by a livery of pink orchids, lay a thin black-haired woman, asleep. Mesmerized, Daclamitus stared at her tawny skin and finely drawn features. Could this beauty command the defiling magic that blighted the world? How could she maintain this sanctuary? Suddenly angry at his own doubt, he fell upon the sleeping woman and gagged her, then bound her hands with leather thongs.

As she stared in panic, he told her, "Never let your guard down while a templar lives." He meant to sound smug, yet as he watched her struggle with her bonds, he felt only shame, and his voice revealed it. She fell still and looked at him with curiosity. He said, "I seek—" and then, after a pause, he finished, "learning." The word surprised them both.

When he took her from the cave, she put up no resistance. Then he perceived a dark shape against the darker sky. A low growl, an odor of sweat—now, in the light from the cavern mouth, a speckling of black on yellow fur—he knew the beast. A leopard, from the Forest Ridge, moving to attack!

Daclamitus made ready to call for help, but he stopped in amazement as the woman said, "Naurax, back! Don't hurt him." She had worked her gag free—could she have done that at any time? The creature halted and growled in

frustration. Then, to the templar's astonishment, the leopard turned and silently vanished into the darkness.

Templar and wizard looked at each other. "You mean to take me to Tyr, I assume," she said in a cool contralto voice.

He nodded, forgetting to scowl as befits a captor.

On the long march back to Tyr, Daclamitus interrogated the woman, who gave the name Averil. He asked, "Why did you save me from the leopard?"

"I value my sanctuary," she said. "I swore a vow that no living thing would come to harm there, if I could help it. There I gather everything I love."

On that long trip he asked more questions, and she answered frankly. His questions grew less hostile and more far-ranging. He drank deeply of her knowledge, first learning of preserver magic and then, before the trip ended, resolving that the way of the preservers should not perish.

When they reached Tyr, Daclamitus artfully deceived his underlings and brought Averil undetected from the torture chambers. He forged the evidence of her death. Then he hid her in a secret grotto he knew, in a line of low hills far outside the city walls. With her went the guardian leopard, Naurax. In the templar's heart love grew for Averil, his daring partner against the evil of the world.

But Antrifos, the ambitious watcher, did not believe the record of Averil's death. Why had the Sleepless One secured so little information? "No," he thought, "he carries out his scheme." So Antrifos continued to observe.

From the Two, Many

Daclamitus conceived a bold plan. He petitioned Kalak for greater resources to hunt wizards, pointing out that Kalak's iron mines sorely needed slaves. (This happened in ages past, before Kalak began his mad ziggurat.) Kalak heeded his favorite's wishes, and Daclamitus became perhaps the most powerful templar in Tyr's bloodstained history.

His troops scoured the city and beyond. Many households heard a knock in the night, and the Sleepless One snared dozens of wizards. He interrogated each in private, separating the foul defilers from the preservers. The defilers perished in the arena games, but the preservers went to Kalak's iron mines.

They toiled little in that tortured earth, however, for the other part of Daclamitus's plan saved them. The preservers encountered bad gasses, falling rock, or other "fatal" accidents. In reality they escaped, via templar magic and the arts of the mind, to Averil's grotto. There she instructed them in the magical arts, and Daclamitus, visiting in disguise, taught them the equally subtle art of subterfuge. When twelve men and women had gathered in the grotto, Daclamitus christened them the first Council of the Veiled Alliance.

Averil and Daclamitus saw each new preserver added to their ranks as a son or daughter, and taught them to address one another as "brother" or "sister." Here you see the basis of one sign of the Veiled Alliance, "My father is a templar," and its countersign, "My mother is a gardener."

They taught the Council to seek others and establish the Alliance's protections wherever they could; to honor the way of the preserver, and aid their brothers and sisters;

and to learn as little about one another as possible. This way, if one fell into enemy hands, not all would perish.

The templar and the mage taught them the Alliance's aims, just as you learned them when I recruited you, noble sir. And Daclamitus, over Averil's objections, propounded the doctrine of requital, which you learned at your initiation: that those who leave the Alliance must die. The life of a templar, conditioned by incessant fear of betrayal, inspires ruthlessness. In his long rise to power, Daclamitus had learned this lesson so deeply that no magical helm could ever remove it.

Though the early mages resented the idea, they assented to enforce requital and to bind all those who came after to the same oath. "I dislike the idea," said Averil, "but we shall hope we need not put it to the trial."

Little did they know their first trial already approached.

Out of Happiness, Sorrow

Now happiness filled Daclamitus. His success as a templar had brought him power and respect, but never had he known close friends. In the next year and more, noble principles worked their alchemy in him. Where he had felt fear, even he who could kill with a word, he now felt bravery. Where he had lived in an acidic air of hatred and suspicion, he felt love. He watched his twelve turn the hidden grotto into another riot of greenery, and the festive disorder pleased him.

Although he sought to conceal his growing aspirations from the suspicious gaze of his subordinates, all could see a change in him. His lightness of spirit, his new surety of bearing galled them. Envy consumed Antrifos, but he hid it even from himself. The young templar hounded his spies without mercy, threatening them with worse than death unless they uncovered the high templar's secrets.

At last Antrifos discovered that Daclamitus often disguised himself and then journeyed into the desert. "Here I have him," Antrifos thought. He would catch Daclamitus and compel him to reveal his plots to Kalak. Then Kalak would surely find a new favorite-in the brave Antrifos, of course.

In the deep of night, Antrifos gathered a few net-fighters from the games and waited in a narrow alley between Daclamitus's house and the city gate. Daclamitus stumbled into their ambush, but he had not neglected his training during this happy interlude— indeed, he had gained much to train for. He fought grimly, ironically calling on Kalak's power to blast through the nets and fell the gamesmen. Bloodied but firm of purpose, he leaped at Antrifos.

The younger man had strength and vigor, but Daclamitus knew the determination that comes from fighting for love. They struggled in silence. If caught fighting in the streets, the two templars would both suffer Kalak's cruel retribution.

When Antrifos lunged and lost balance, Daclamitus closed and delivered the final blow. But as Antrifos fell, he sent forth all his long hatred and envy, cursing Daclamitus in Kalak's name. The foul doom blighted Daclamitus. He destroyed his enemy's body and staggered home, scarcely able to move under Antrifos's blight.

Painfully he removed his disguise and tried the healing arts he knew. Nothing deterred the curse, so in agony he

summoned his underlings. The templars arrived at midnight and performed their offices—or claimed they did—to no avail. Perhaps hoping their leader's fate would incur Kalak's anger, they carried Daclamitus to the sorcerer-king's palace.

Kalak showed no anger. He dismissed the templars and calmly dispelled the curse. But in doing so, Kalak also dispelled the virtue wrought by the helm. Daclamitus's old nature returned—greed, ambition, hatred, and distrust—stronger than ever after the helm's long repression.

For a few moments Daclamitus lay speechless, tears streaming down his face as he felt the capacity for joy, for love, slip away. Kalak stood grimly by. Some in our brotherhood believe that the sorcerer-king had entertained only vague suspicions of Daclamitus's changed nature. But others hold that Kalak had known at every moment of his templar's plans and ambitions, and now dispelled them because they worked well with a scheme of his own to destroy all preservers in Tyr. Who can say? Who knows the mind of a sorcerer-king?

Daclamitus dried his tears, for he could no longer remember why he shed them. His voice rough with a newfound hatred, he laid out a plan to destroy the society he had founded.

He would go to the grotto the next day. While he distracted the preservers with sham lessons, his templars and guards could approach from without. Then when he said a certain word, they would assault and destroy the wizards. Kalak arranged matters at once.

The next day Daclamitus hastened to the thriving grotto. Averil greeted him with a kiss and presented him with a nightingale. It had flown into the grotto, and Averil had charmed it. He did not smile, either at her kiss or the bird's sweet song. Naurax the leopard growled low, and Averil knew sudden suspicion. While the templar looked elsewhere, Averil used the very system of signs that Daclamitus had taught them, to warn the others to beware.

Daclamitus began his lesson. Five of the students drew close, asking him questions, apparently absorbed in the teachings. The others secretly prepared their charms and countercharms, hoping that they had learned earlier lessons well. Then Daclamitus spoke the name of Kalak, and the templars rushed in.

The terrible battle threw Averil against Daclamitus. She held a dagger but did not strike, and as she struggled in his grip, she thought only, "Where has the man I knew gone, and why has he left us?" But she could not dare to shed a tear, though in his eyes she saw only hatred. She saw the mind that had formed the doctrine of requital. With that thought, she stabbed. As Daclamitus fell, she said in a dead, dry voice, "This time I did not let down my guard."

Kalak arrived at battle's end. He found many fallen templars, many guards, and the bloody carcass of the leopard. Of the preservers he found . . . five. He raged, for a new enemy had appeared and, worse yet, vanished in the same moment. He would never relax his guard again. He ordered the body of Daclamitus burnt without honor and its ashes scattered to the winds. Never since has a templar commanded such power. Never since has anyone commanded a tyrant's trust.

Out Into the World

Averil and the seven surviving men and women of the First Council retreated to another mountain sanctuary within sight of Rogal Tor. The king's spies watched the Tor for months in hopes the wizards would return, but finally Kalak lost patience and recalled them. When the spies vanished, the wizards did indeed return to restore the cave's verdant life.

After months of healing herbs and regimens, the wizards regained their strength. After years of introspection and discussion, they regained their determination. While Averil lived, none mentioned the fate of Daclamitus. She had come to love him and share in his dream. In that spirit, she prepared the seven not only in the magical arts, but in philosophy as well, that they might learn to seek and recognize the good.

After some years, she called the seven together and said, "The time has come to cast you into the world. I have trained you in all I know of magic. Now you must conceal these arts and live using the trades you have learned. But the Veiled Alliance must survive. Duty compels us not just to preserve our lives, but more, to preserve our bond."

"Do not forget me, your mother, nor Daclamitus, your father. He made us. Let his fate teach you constant vigilance. I give you my blessing."

Then she sent them away across the land. A year later one of the seven returned to the sanctuary. He found that the beautiful green plants had died, and there was no sign of Averil. Instead, in the center of the cave lay a pile of ash gathered by the wind.

Now this man had a gift for sensing the shreds of past time that cling to any object like a tracery. He rubbed the ash between his fingers, assensing its history. Later he spoke to his fellows with wonder and tears. "Not her," he said. "I don't know what became of her. Not her, no. *He* returned."

The story of our founding carries the irony that still marks our existence. A templar founded this society of wizards; our founder became the agent of our betrayal and exposure to the enemy. The society, devoted to preserving the life of our world, still espouses a doctrine of requital that better befits the ruthless templars. Later you may discover other ironies. Do not let them blind you to the truth we support.

At times Tyr's Alliance has grown large, and at times it has withered almost to vanishing. But just as ashes nourish the roots of plants, a new Alliance always reforms. Likewise we always face hardship, so long as ignorance remains. Visiting wizards from other cities tell of the same problems, and I understand that when they return home, they sometimes begin their own Alliances. These do not follow ours, but they will shelter you as you travel, as you must shelter them.

So keep our cause forever in mind, and remember to help your brothers and sisters where you can. Service and silence above all, noble sir. In drinking this water of knowledge, you have truly become one of us. To you, my new brother, I say welcome!

Allen Varney wrote the AD&D® DARK SUN™ campaign accessory DSR3, Veiled Alliance. Ω



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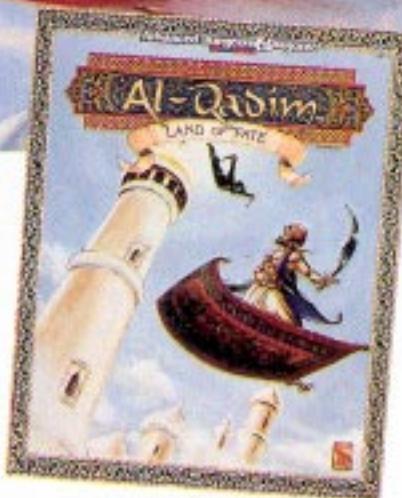
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The VOYAGE of the PRINCESS ARK

Part 32: Silence of the lizards

by Bruce A. Heard

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

This series chronicles the adventures of an Alphatian explorer and his crew as they journey across the D&D® Known World in their skyship. The information herein may be used to expand D&D campaigns using the Gazetteer series.

From the Journals of
PRINCE HALDEMAR OF HAAKEN
Lord Admiral of the Mightiest Empire
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PRINCESS ARK
Imperial Explorer, Etc., Etc.

Amphimir 23, AY 2001: There was a reference in the Saragòn Gazetteer about some savage kingdoms hidden in the dark forests of the Shady River. We had been meandering above those thick woods for a week and had almost given up hope of finding anything when we discovered some structures below.

There was a small clearing in the woods in which several very large mounds of dried mud had been erected. At first we thought they were giant termite colonies, but the painting on the mounds and the size of the entrances and windows alluded to humanoid origins. By our standards this was a large town, considering the number of mounds there.

Moving the invisible *Princess Ark* closer, we observed great activity among the lizard men in the woods. Several lizard men carried the body of a dead warrior on a small bier. From our vantage point we clearly saw the eyes were missing from the dead warrior's head. Perhaps this was some ghastly local custom.

Some lizard men blew auroch horns and others beat drums, while the bulk of the crowd followed, weeping or looking somberly at the ground as they marched toward the burial grounds we'd earlier spotted from our vantage point. There, they dropped the body into an funeral urn made of terra cotta. They then added weapons, colorful feathers, ornamental trinkets, and other personal effects. The urn was then sealed and was lowered with ropes into a hole in the ground, over which a large flat stone was laid down. Finally, a shaman—an old hag of a lizard woman—painted a regular pattern of symbols on the stone while making bizarre incantations with her raspy voice. From this we gathered these lizard men had some sort of written language—quite unusual for lizardkin.

Raman was ecstatic to be able to observe such a ceremony. The behavior of such a primitive race of nonhumans was of great interest to our sage. He said he would really love to obtain one or two of the urns for study. I found that rather ghoulish, but I could see usefulness in any findings he might make.

Later that night, I sent Raman and several of the crew down into the graveyard. We could observe them from above, aboard the *Ark*, and warn them if anyone approached. Fortunately, the lizard men were diurnal creatures—most were asleep except for several warriors walking the streets around the mounds.

As Raman was loading a second urn onto the lifeboat, a horrible shriek echoed from the lizard-man town. Raman and his





crew quickly repositioned the tombstones and hurried back to the ship.

Soon, we found out that one of the warriors guarding the streets had been killed. A number of warriors standing around his body formed a protective circle with their spears, staring into the darkness. They looked terrified. The shaman, kneeling next to the corpse, lowered her torch to reveal a horrible wound on the warrior's face. His eye sockets were now two gaping holes. Perhaps some wild beast preyed on the lizard men. I had never seen such a wound before.

Amphimir 24: I ordered the skyship to a higher altitude while Raman began his study of the two urns. His library came in handy in the deciphering of the symbols. The urns had prayers written on them, and such words as "Be you blessed, O Warrior Ss'akh, for your defense of our ancient city Ah'roog. May the Mighty Ka'ar keep you safe forever."

Both corpses found in the urns were rather recent—no more than three or four days. There was nothing of great value inside the urns. Medicinal herbs had preserved the bodies somewhat. Both bore the same facial wounds as the guard. Further observation revealed their brains were also gone, as if they had been sucked out. What manner of monster could have done this?

We returned the two urns to their graves. After Raman had completed all of his observations, it seemed no one had noticed our visit. I then ordered a course to the northwest, toward a large bay marked on our Gazetteer. I had no wish to find out what kind of monstrosity lay behind the gruesome lizard-men deaths.

Amphimir 25: The sound of flapping wings drew my attention. Just after nightfall, something came straight at us out of the night. I ordered an evasive maneuver, but that "something" screeched and kept turning back in our direction. It was clearly chasing us.

We heard a thud. Something had hit one of our masts and had fallen to the deck. There, rubbing its head, sat a lizard man—actually a lizard woman. It was the old hag, the shaman from Ah'roog. Next to her lay a giant bat with a broken wing. It was an old thing, with holes and rips in its leather wings. Totally exhausted and suffering from its shattered limb, the poor creature passed away.

A ring of befuddled boltmen encircled the shaman, wondering whether to roast her with their wands or toss her overboard. She began talking in a succession of quick rattles, clicks, snaps, and raspy lizard words. After some I performed some spell-casting, I could understand what she said. Then, pointing a gnarled finger at me, she added "You, I know you. I saw you in my dreams. Ka'ar sent you to help us!"

These lizards were truly strange. She went on, "I am Haz'ar, the wise one of Ah'roog. Ka'ar has spoken to me in my

dreams. He told me of you and your wondrous ship. He spoke of the great beasts you once defeated, O Great Hero of the humans."

Immortals speaking of me? To lizard men? Hmm, this did not seem right at all. I invited the wretched creature below and further questioned her. She told me some monstrous fiend had begun stalking the city of Ah'roog about a week ago. The lizard men could not catch it. They lost warriors during the nights to the fiend, sometimes just one, other times up to five or six. All of them bore the same horrible wounds.

Days ago, Haz'ar began having her dreams. She believed they came from her Immortal patron, Ka'ar, and in this she seemed truthful. Her dreams showed the four eyes of the monster stalking her warriors, and from them came visions of war. These visions, however, she didn't understand. They showed humans fighting humans, the symbol of an eagle in the sunset, and that of a winged bull against a sunrise. Then followed the image of an hourglass tumbling in the night, and always the gaze of the fiend would appear at the end of her visions, as if they had been sent by him.

I was utterly astonished! A chill ran down my back as I realized the eagle and the winged bull could be the symbols of Thyatis and Alphatia! A war? Again? No, this couldn't be. But what was this hourglass? A symbol of times to come, perhaps. Somehow, this fiend was at the center of the puzzle. Surely, it must have been playing tricks on the mind of this old hag. This fiend knew enough about Thyatis, Alphatia, and me to fabricate fantasies and get an obscure lizard shaman to find me. Why? What did it want with me? This was all too strange. I had to find out who or what was behind all this.

I agreed to help Haz'ar find the fiend. With a wide smile revealing the rotten and broken teeth on her reptilian face, Haz'ar fell to her scaly knees. "Praise Ka'ar! Ka'ar preserve us all!"

Alphamir 4: In the days following Haz'ar's visit to the *Ark*, we disembarked and went to Ah'roog. We heard of a few more slayings occurring near a village called T'lak, and we began our journey north after the fiend. The pattern then continued in the direction of Ry'takk. The fiend was on the move. Perhaps it sensed we were tracking it. Several times we came close to encountering it, but it always seemed to outguess us and escape safely into the dark forest. At best, we saw a vague shape vanish into the shadows.

Soon we reached the border of the Kingdom of Cay. Haz'ar described it as a nation of cay-men—small, pretentious people, half-human, half-caiman, and about half as tall as lizard men. Haz'ar's nation, the Kingdom of Shazak, was presently at peace with Cay. Perhaps the fiend thought of entering the other nation to throw off his pursuers. Haz'ar insisted she

wanted to continue the hunt, for the fiend might return. It had to be destroyed once and for all. So we marched. Unbeknownst to Haz'ar, the *Ark* was flying just above, observing each of our moves. This was very reassuring.

Alphamir 8: Our trail lead us to Tu'eth, the capital of the cay-man. It seemed that slayings of cay-man hunters had preceded us by a day or so, and they were happening twice as often now. Already, word had come of more hideous murders within the city of Tu'eth. At least we hadn't lost track of the fiend.

A band of armored warriors riding chariots met us at the entrance of Tu'eth. The diminutive warriors stood arrogantly behind their lizard striders, proudly wearing peacock feathers on top of their scaly heads. One of them, waving his puny little javelin at us, said with a strange squealing and wheezing voice, "Strangers, state your business or succumb to the wrath of Cay!"

Seeing my hand slip to my wand, Haz'ar put her hand on my arm and answered "We come in peace, O noble cay-lords! We seek to slay the fiend that killed the mighty hunters of Cay!" She bowed deeply.

The leader of the cay-men rode up to me, and, with his fists on his hips, stared up at me inquisitively. "I don't trust them. Let's take them to the queen! March ahead, strangers!" We complied.

Cay-man guards on the palisade surrounding the Queen's compound sounded their trumpets when we arrived. We were "loaded" into a large net and hoisted to the other side by a crane. There, the Royal Guards of Cay escorted us to the queen's throne, where she sat brooding. Before her lay the body of someone important, judging from the jewelry and feathers. His eyes were missing.

"So," she squealed, "you have come to slay the fiend. You are late. He who lies at my feet is my younger brother. He too has fallen before the fiend. He tried to battle the beast and lost. It seems that both Shazak and Cay are suffering from the same plague."

"Your Majesty," I dared, "it is indeed our quest to slay the beast. With your permission, we must be allowed to continue. Many more lives are at stake."

The queen, observing me with suspicion, said, "Why do you wish to help, human?"

"I too seek revenge, your Majesty. The fiend had tasted human blood before he harmed your noble subjects. No one is safe. Where was your brother found?"

The cay-men whispered and whistled among each other, glancing often in my direction with distrusting looks. The queen then shook her rattle-scepter and said, "He was found in the Mines of Hwezzah. Go there, human, and take your lizard shaman with you. If you slay the monster, you shall go free. If not, I shall condemn you to work for the rest of your lives in the mines. Leave now."

Alphamir 9: Not until the evening did we reach the mines, a terrible place with a

single narrow shaft going straight down. We descended and entered a network of tunnels with little cubby-holes dug into the walls that were the resting places of the slaves working there. Most had gone nearly blind from the darkness and screamed in pain at the light of our torches.

A cay-man guard cracked his whip to send the slaves back to work, but most were too terrified to leave their holes. The fiend had indeed been here, judging from the number of slaves' bodies. All work at the mine had come to a halt because of the fiend's presence.

The guards weren't in much better shape. They walked in little groups, cautiously staring around them. Beyond one point in the cave, they would not advance further. One of the guards pointed forward, "He was found there." The guards then retreated in good order.

Haz'ar and I walked down a tunnel, bent low to avoid hitting the ceilings with our heads. I heard a clicking sound. "What's that?" I asked.

"My old knees," answered Haz'ar. It was obvious she was almost petrified with fear, yet she continued down the tunnel.

"This is silly. There is no need for us to do this alone," I said. I cast a *travel* spell and returned us both to the *Princess Ark*. Talasar was relieved to see us both safely back aboard. I had to rest and meditate for more appropriate spells. Our next day would be a difficult one.

Alphamir 10: I returned to the tunnel the next day with Xerdon, Nyanga, Haz'ar, and Talasar, all ready for battle. Nyanga stood in the front, his huge sword strapped to his back—only a smaller blade could be used in these tight quarters.

The tunnel led to a larger chamber. The light from our torches glinted off the red ore on the vault. The cay-men had found a small vein of cinnabar. Perhaps this is what attracted the creature in this mine.

Suddenly, a large blob of hideous orange flesh appeared from the shadows. It moved fast, as much on its six crab legs as on its dozens of tentacles. Without a moment of hesitation, Talasar, Xerdon, and I let our spells fly at once. Almost instantly, the creature grabbed a pillar and caused the chamber to cave in.

Everyone ducked and scrambled. Talasar, Xerdon, and Haz'ar dove to one side, Nyanga and I to the other. The torches went out as billowing clouds of dust filled the chamber. Soon, I discovered tons of rubble separated us from our companions. We were trapped in darkness.

The sound of something fleeing echoed ahead. I cast a spell of *light*, just to see the shadow of the fiend writhing away down a tunnel.

"Come," I said to Nyanga, "We must chase it, the others will catch on and follow if they can." We ran down the tunnel, which grew narrower with an underground river running down the middle. We could see the creature ahead, swimming away. Several dugout canoes of cay-

man workmanship lay by the side of the river. We jumped into one and paddled frantically after the fiend.

Much later, when the river had gained dangerously in speed, we could no longer see anywhere to put ashore. Centuries of roaring waters had smoothed out the sides of the tunnel. The water rushed down the passage at a frightening speed, and the canoe shook so much I could not cast a spell to save my life. We both grabbed the canoe's sides and held on. Before we realized what was happening, the canoe was sucked into a vicious whirlpool. Everything went dark as my head hit a rock, somewhere in the roaring waters.

Alphamir 10, Talasar: It was a trap. The fiend must have known that the pillar supported the chamber's vaulted ceiling, and deliberately caused the cave-in to split our party. It must have guessed that we were too much for it to fight as a group. We had to find the admiral at once.

We went down another tunnel, trying to find a way around the rubble. At first, all we achieved was to run into small groups of cay-man guards. To them, we were dangerous intruders. They all ran away, but we could hear their leaders trying to rally the troops. They were organizing a man-hunt.

It became clear we could not fight their well-organized search parties. Mobs of cay-men guards ran down the tunnels with javelins and nets, hoping to find us. We played hide-and-seek for hours before Xerdon spotted the admirals footprints. At least, he and Nyanga were still alive. They had gone after the fiend.

Soon afterward, we reached a series of dugout canoes. We could hear cay-men chiefs shouting orders and the sound of war trumpets echoing in the tunnel. We fled in one of the canoes after setting fire to the others.

Paddling downstream, we could see the cay-men guards jumping up and down, waving their short arms at us. Haz'ar smiled smugly, and as the water gained speed, she said, "They want us to come back! Su-ure . . . well, that's one man-hunt going down the drain!"

Alphamir 11, Haldemar: Lucky that Nyanga was there, else I would have drowned. We had reached a siphon bubbling up into an aboveground river. Nyanga managed to swim back to the canoe, drag me aboard, then collapse inside, totally exhausted. We drifted downstream most of the night, without strength or paddles.

The sun rose above the fog. The river had entered a swampy region. It was hard to tell where we were. The canoe then hit something and stopped.

"Eh mohn, there be a tree trunk in the way," said Nyanga. Suddenly, he pulled out his giant sword. "That be no tree trunk, mohn. It moved."

"Yo, who you callin' a tree trunk, punk?" A seven-foot-tall creature stood right behind the canoe. It looked like a giant cay-

man, but with huge jaws and jagged teeth. Nyanga took a swing at it, but another swamp creature rose behind him and grabbed his wrist. Two others rose out of the muck and caught me before I could cast a spell.

"Hey, dey're no lizers. Whaddya think, Gnarfi?" said one.

"Yeh, dat's weird. Dey ain't got no scales. Let's eat 'em!" said Gnarff.

"Nye, I dunno. Let's take 'em to Gur-rash. Maybe the chief'll rewar' us" intervened a third with an eye patch. They tied us up, sank the canoe, and swam away, carrying us on their scaly backs.

Alphamir 11, Talasar: This was indeed a rough ride. The whirlpool that spewed us out of the bowels of cay-men tunnels had split our canoe down the middle. We ended up swimming back to the river bank. Beyond lay a realm of swamps. Wild-eyed, Haz'ar said, "We can't go any further. This is the Bayou, the land of the gator men. They're big, they're fierce, and they're always hungry. And they hate lizardkin."

Well, we couldn't abandon the admiral. Our best chance was to get back to the *Princess Ark*. Of course, she was *invisible*, but perhaps we could attract her attention. Xerdon cast a *wall of fire*. If the fire didn't catch, at least the smoke would be visible from miles away.

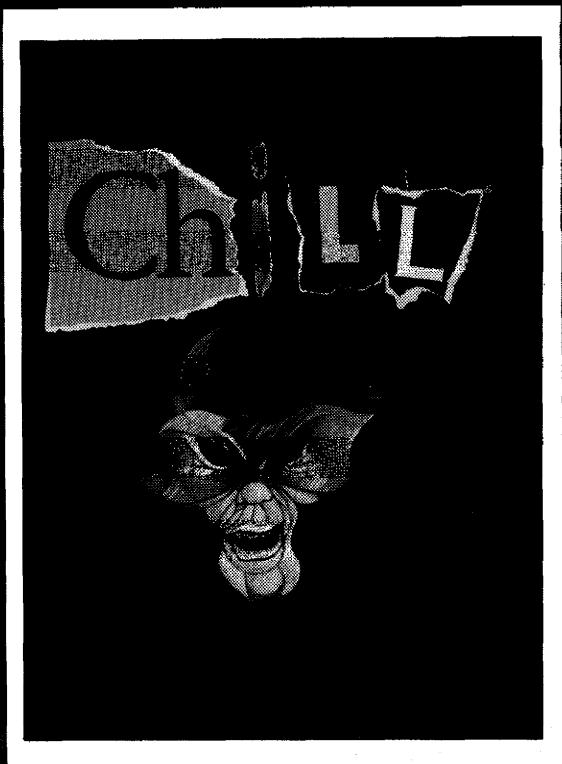
Alphamir 13, Haldemar: I landed heavily in a mud puddle when my reptilian captor shook me off his back.

We had been swimming down the *Swamplight River*, according to Gnarff. We reached a spot in a huge lagoon where these giant alligator men crowded the water. Without warning, Gnarff dove underwater and swam down to some cave. Beyond lay a vast complex partially filled with water. Of the three races encountered in this region, this one was the most primitive. No paintings, sculptures, or feathers here. Just filthy, smelly muck. And lots of tall gator men. "You wait 'ere," said Gnarff.

Hours later, an even bigger and meaner-looking gator man approached. He wore a strange armor made of lizard skin and bones, and on his head was a spiked helmet made of crocodile skin. He yanked both Nyanga and I off our feet and carried us down to a large chamber. From the looks of it, it had to be some temple. There were pits of bubbling mud, cracks in the ground from which rose blue flames and an 18'-tall statue of a reptilian humanoid with two apelike heads, tentacles instead of arms, and a forked tail. That couldn't be good. Nyanga and I were tied with bamboo strips to a large altar. That wasn't good either. The big gator man then said, "Tomorrow you will be sacrificed to the Avatar of Gorn." That was bad.

Alphamir 13, Talasar: Blasted be the swamp fog! We were lucky enough to get the *Princess Ark's* attention, but we haven't been able to find the admiral so far. I fear the worst.

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We've reached an island at the center of a large lagoon. Haz'ar says it is the heart of the Kingdom of Ator, a huge swamp ruled by brutish, cruel gator men. We circled the island several times, but could not see any towns, mounds, or burrows of any kind. Haz'ar suspects the gator men live under the water in subterranean dwellings. Had the admiral been a lizardkin, they would have killed him instantly. But humans—they wouldn't know what to make of them, according to Haz'ar. Thus, there still is a small chance that he and Nyanga are inside the gator-men's lair, somewhere beneath us, under miles of swamps stretching below the *Princess Ark*. But where?

Well, it seemed a gator hunt was due. I ordered the crew to drop lines with hooks and bait. Perhaps we could force a few gator men to speak.

Indeed, a gator man swam by and stopped near a hook. After observing the bait, he grabbed the line out of the water and saw the hook. He then gazed at the line, following it up to the point where it became *invisible*.

"Hey, how dat get up dere?" he mumbled while tugging on the line. He then started to climb the line. Ramissur was at the other end, waiting with a big mallet. That gator man never knew what hit him. When he wakes up, he'll have a long conversation with us.

Alphamir 14, Haldemar: The time had come. Neither Nyanga nor I had managed to loosen the bamboo strips that held us on the altar. The gator men now filled the chamber, chanting crude incantations. The queen of the gator men appeared and took her place on a throne to the side of the chamber. Then two gator men cranked up a large bamboo gate, revealing the entrance to a dark cavern.

From behind the gate came gurgling, hissing, and growling sounds. Soon a horrible creature crawled out. The gator men cheered. Suddenly, I recognized the monster—it was the fiend that we had pursued down into the mines of the cay-men. It stopped its bizarre noises, then sighed. "Oh, so sorry. I didn't know it was you! You didn't believe I was going to eat you, now did you? All I really want is your brain. Hold on a minute."

It turned toward the gator men, roared, and writhed its tentacles menacingly at them. The gator men bowed deeply and quickly left the chamber.

"Now, that's better. The fools believe I am the avatar of Gorn, the Immortal patron of the gator men. What a crock!" the fiend added.

I couldn't believe my ears. Perhaps the evil creature was just toying with me before killing me. There was nothing I could do, so I decided to find out what he was up to. "Now, what is a fiend like you doing in a swamp like this?"

It looked truly surprised. "A fiend! Me? Oh come now, you don't see any batlike wings on my back, do you? Do I wear any

horns or a forked tail, hmmm? Can't you tell? I'm a Neh-Thalgu, from the University of Jawwag-Uf. I'm a student in interplanar cosmogonic magic."

Totally baffled, I asked, "Well, in what manner may my brain help you? I know nothing of interplanar cosmogonic magic, whatever it is."

The creature writhed its tentacles. "I didn't think you would. You see, I am studying the cause and effect of the magical drain on the world of Mystara. In order to complete my thesis I needed to acquire the brains of typical wizards of this world. I've already got a Nithian from the Hollow World, a Glantrian, and a Herathian. I couldn't possibly leave without a Alphatian specimen, now could I?"

That was totally bizarre. I still had to know about Haz'ar's dreams and those symbols. "At the risk of boring you out of your brain my friend, do tell me of the shaman's dreams, and what the eagle and winged-bull symbols have to do with all this?"

Several blobs of orange flesh began pulsing on the Neh-Thalgu. "I haven't a clue of what you are talking about. By Qywattz, don't get weird on me! What dreams would these be?"

I answered, "Well, the ones you sent Haz'ar, the lizard shaman of Shazak, of course!"

The Neh-Thalgu's four eyes squinted. "What hazard, what shaman? Say, wait a minute now. I think I know. You see, I was until recently a prisoner of the Wizard King of Herath. I was captured just after acquiring the brain of one of their noblemen. I became the object of his studies, and later he had me thrown into his dungeon. Many years later, I saw you running down a hallway of the very same dungeon, just past the door to my cell, with hordes of giant hunting spiders after you.

"The next thing I knew, the Wizard King came and visited me, told me of your brilliant mind, cast a series of spells compelling me to feed gruesomely on the saurians' eyes and brains for some time—yuk!—and had me released at the edge of the Bayou. Now I understand why.

"He must have done all this to set you up to find me, so I could acquire your brain. That lizard shaman of yours became a convenient tool to get you to hunt me. I do know for a fact the Wizard King knew how to send dreams. He tested that on me several times. The Wizard King also knew the kin of Shazak fairly well, since his people trade with them on a regular basis. That lizard shaman must have been someone he knew to be resourceful enough to get in your way—so he must have been the one sending those dreams. What can I say, the man is brilliant! Of course, I don't mind this arrangement at all. Now, about that brain of yours . . ."

I had to think fast. "Hold on for a minute, young man. You said you collected a Herathian brain. Now, wasn't there some-

thing odd about that Herathian? I truly must know."

"Odd? Like what?" it asked, crossing its crab legs.

"I'm not sure." I ventured. "Something about spiders. Big, ugly, hairy spiders."

The bloated hump that I presumed contained the Herathian brain pulsed and jiggled for a minute. The Neh-Thalgu then said, "Hmm, Wait . . . Hard to tell with those aliens. Oh yes, that's really odd, never noticed that. What the . . ." The Neh-Thalgu opened its eyes wide as drool dripped from its gaping mouth. Suddenly, it straightened up, haughtily looking down at me with its four yellow eyes. With an imperious voice it then inquired, "What are you doing in my presence, human? I am Lord Achym of Ensheya, spider-lord of Shahav!" Then, confused, the Neh-Thalgu hesitated. "No, wait."

I could have sworn this was someone else speaking. Judging from its looks, this Neh-Thalgu was going insane. It looked like it was suffering from an acute split-personality syndrome. What could have caused this? Perhaps all those alien brains—must be unhealthy after a while.

The Neh-Thalgu drooled more. "Aha! I know now. I am Lady Aliana Nyraviel of Glantri, Countess of Seth-Kabree, Dragonmaster of the second circle! And what's with you, Alphatian?"

I risked a last question. "I seek an hourglass tumbling in the night."

"An hourglass? The one I honor is the symbol of the d'Ambrevilles! And why would you care? Why would I care? Just who am I?" The befuddled Neh-Thalgu drooled even more. Then suddenly, it began chanting what seemed delirious Thothian incantations, and added "It's breached! It's breached! The Old One comes!" Finally, the Neh-Thalgu screeched horribly and ran away screaming into the dark.

Fortunately, he forgot his scalpel! Nyanga managed to grab it and free us in no time. We had to get out of there quickly; there was no telling how long the Neh-Thalgu's insanity would last. I didn't know what went wrong with that Herathian brain, but it certainly confused the Neh-Thalgu's wits.

We could not escape with a *travel* spell—I had already used it to enter the cay-man mine, days ago, and I hadn't meditated for new spells since. But Nyanga had a brilliant idea. While I cast a *light* spell, he threw the chamber's torches into a puddle. Then, Nyanga pulled a bamboo mat off the throne, covered it with a thick layer of wet mud, and tossed it on one of the two flaming cracks in the rock. The hissing gases soon blew the mat off, but the flames were already extinguished. He repeated the operation on the other crack. Flammable gases rapidly began filling the chamber. We had to act fast.

Nyanga then rang a gong at the chamber's entrance. He hit it strongly enough that it echoed down many galleries wind-

ing away from us. I then cast a spherical force field around us and hoped our plan would work.

Alphamir 14, Talasar: That gator man would not speak. Even Haz'ar's tickling act with a feather failed miserably, despite the gator-man's thunderous laughter. I considered with great reluctance the possibility of certain, more extreme interrogation techniques when Xerdon had an idea. We tied the gator man to a rope and dangled him in front of Berylith's mouth. We then asked her to become visible. That did it. The gator man sang like a scaly bird.

The problem was that the gator-man's "capital" was nowhere to be seen. The whole thing lay below ground, under tons of the lagoon's muck. We considered using some *water breathing* potions, but we would still have to, contend with hundreds of rather large gator men.

Just then, a low rumbling came from the water. At first, there were just a few large bubbles, but then the entire surface of the water seem to turn into a volcano, with rocks, flames, and bits of gator men flying in all directions, just barely missing the *Princess Ark*. The brutal eruption ended as quickly as it began, with tons of greenish water rushing back to fill some underground vacuum. Surely, if the admiral had been down there, he would be dead by now.

A sphere covered with mud came bobbing up at the surface of the water. The sludge dripped off, revealing the Admiral and Nyanga, sitting inside a translucent sphere, laughing hysterically. We immediately sent a life boat down to recover them.

Epilogue, Haldemar: A mystery unveiled only other mysteries. What the Wizard King of Herath had told me during my visit at his palace seemed pure fantasy. Perhaps some warped truth lay behind his words, perhaps not. He knew the dreams of eagles and winged bulls sent to Haz'ar would be of interest to me. Was that only a trick to get me involved?

Yet, the creature told of his studies concerning the loss of magic in Mystara. This corroborates the scroll I took from the Wizard King¹. How could this be mere coincidence? And then, I cannot ignore the Neh-Thalgu's comment about the hour-glass of Glantri—information that presumably came from the Neh-Thalgu's Ghantrian brain. Who are those d'Am-brevilles? Who is that Old One? These could all have been the delirious words of an insane alien. But what if they weren't?

This uncertainty is eating at me. As soon as I can, I must unveil that which lies in the dark, be it truth or trickery.

¹ See the epilogue in issue #183, "Web of the Wizard King."

To be continued . . .

The Squamous Kingdoms

Kingdom of Shazak —Capital: Ah'roog (pop.: 7,500 lizard men); ruler: Shazak XII "The Slick," son of Shazak XI "No Tail"; tribal domain includes the forested area between the Bayou's eastern edge and the rakastas' Forest Marches of Wyndham; patron: Ka'ar.

Lizard men, like the cay-men and the gator men of Ator, were the result of magical experimentation performed many centuries ago. Ancient araneas of Herath originally constructed them from humans magically crossed with dragons. The result was less than satisfactory, since lizard men never developed any of the desirable elements of either race. They became rather crude, bipedal carnivores with a smattering of civilization. They failed as a race of servants and were eventually tossed into the Bayou.

Rather prolific, they quickly overpopulated the area and many of the original tribes spread into other regions of Mystara. These were the more primitive, degenerate breeds incapable of competing with the wiser race. Thanks to subsequent genetic breeding on the part of Herathian sages (and some faith in their Immortal, Ka the Preserver), the few tribes remaining in Shazak became somewhat more advanced and a bit less chaotic, but still not enough to provide any great service to Herathians.

Over the centuries, the lizard men were thrown out of the Bayou by newcomers—the gator men, another ill-fated Herathian experiment (see "Kingdom of Ator," below). The kin of Shazak adapted to the dark forests north of Herath, which was a positive factor in their evolution as a species. No longer confined to the wetlands of the Bayou, they developed a primitive artform, a written language composed of ideological symbols conveying simple concepts, and a very rudimentary phonetic alphabet. Some Herathian influence can still be found there.

Some nobles of Herath hire lizard men as mercenaries, as basically expendable front-line assault troops in times of war against the humanoids of the Orc's Head peninsula, but more particularly against the rakastas of Bellayne. Lizard men of Shazak have become ancestral enemies of Bellayne because of their mutual struggle to occupy the forested area between the lizard men's capital, Ah'roog, and Bellayne's Marches of Wyndham. Rakasta war parties have been known to raid the kin of Shazak as far into Shazak as the battle site called Rakasta Grave. Several battles took place in that vicinity, within as little as mile of each other, during the past 50 years. The lizard men never were able to really threaten Bellayne's border because of the ominous presence of the hated gator men to the west. Gator men incursions, especially near the villages of Snaat and Ryt'fak, are as common as they are savage.

It is because of the gator men that the kin of Shazak united their many tribes

behind a single war leader, the Shazak, which is the closest equivalent to a human king in the lizard men's language. This happened around 760 AC. By now, the role of Shazak has become hereditary. Shazaks usually have at least one wokani and one shaman to assist them and act as advisors. There are no social differences between male and female lizard men.

In the past century, the kin of Shazak have learned to domesticate giant bats found in the caverns under the hills of T'lak, between the Shady and Gatorbone Rivers. These mounts have been useful in spotting rakasta incursions. One or two bats usually can be found in each village, with more in Ah'roog. They often become the mounts of greater shamans, wokani, and Shazaks.

Herathians are the quiet allies of Shazak simply because they form a buffer state on their northern border. The kin of Shazak aren't bright enough to figure out the true nature of Herathian nobility. The lizardkin also help keep the rakastas of Bellayne at bay. A small caravan of traders often sails up the Venom River from the town of Sorodh to the village of Kfer, then continues on foot with mules, up to Snaat. There, traders sell their goods at a monthly market, and purchase pelts, pottery, feathers, rare woods, giant bat guano, live monsters, etc.

The City of Ah'roog —excerpt from the scrolls of Raman Nabonidus:

"Two dozen mounds stood so tall they peaked above the highest trees. Smaller ones dotted the forest and formed winding streets under the trees' canopy. Lizard men were building one of those larger mounds, giving us the opportunity to observe that the mounds were erected on top of subterranean dwellings, using the earth dug out from below the surface as construction material. Considering the number of lizard men in the area, the underground network must have been extensive.

"The lizard men were building the larger mound over smaller ones, while using the taller trees as an armature. The mound encased several trees entirely. The live branches of some of the trees still stuck out from the sides of the mound, almost giving it the aspect of a natural hill with saplings, wild ivy, and moss on its slopes. The paint pattern on the exposed mud made all the difference for the untrained eye.

"Although primitive, there was a certain artful taste in the way the lizard men arranged the pattern of live branches, windows, paint, occasional sculpture, and almost chaotic structural protuberances on the sides of the mound. This was obviously the work of a somewhat advanced lizard-man species.

"Entrances were located halfway up the sides of the mound, with stairs snaking

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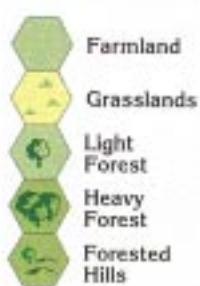
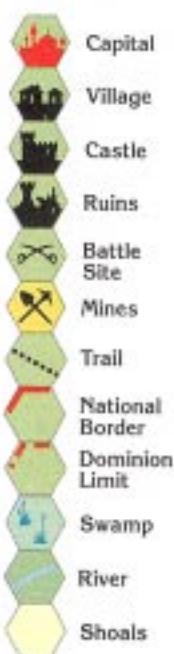
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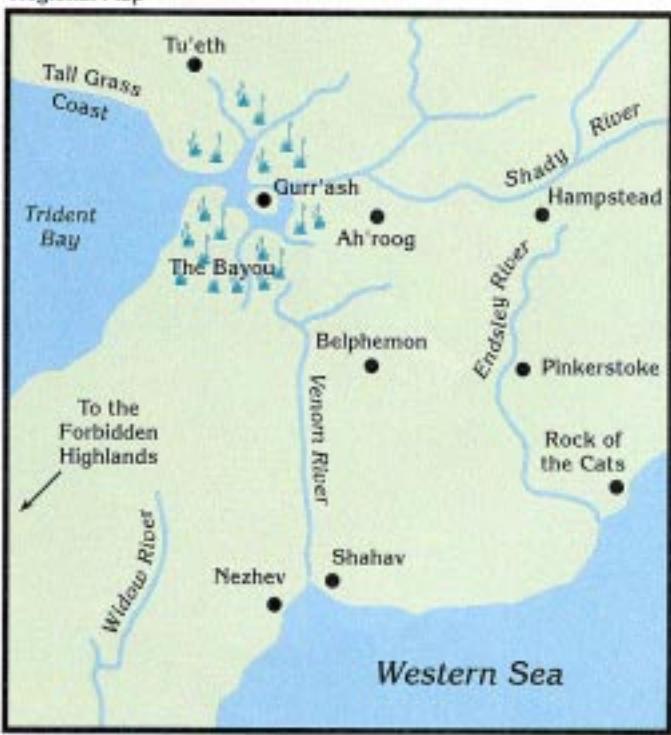
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Regional Map



back down. A funeral procession came down the stairs of a nearby mound."

Kingdom of Ator (The Bayou)—
Capital: Gurr'ash (pop.: 3,200 gator men—outsiders welcome for lunch only); ruler: Queen Ator I "Ole Gray Fangs," slayer of King Osh III; tribal domain includes all of the Bayou; patron: Gorn.

The gator men were a dismal failure on the part of Herathian wizards, at least as far as the wizards were concerned. They hoped that a cross between lizard men and alligators would produce a tougher warrior race to fill the ranks of their armies. Indeed, the gator men turned out to be tough—very tough, very tall, and quite bloodthirsty. Unfortunately, the breed remained very crude and totally unruly. The first specimens used in the army often turned against Herath's human troops. They also turned out to be absolutely incompatible with lizard-man troops, whom they viewed as food.

A few attempts at developing a more controllable breed took place, until a large batch of the creatures escaped from the laboratories, fomented an uprising, and wreaked havoc among sages, nobles, and their guards. After this bloody episode, the surviving gator-man specimens fled into the Bayou despite frantic efforts on the part of the Herathians to eradicate the whole species. Herathian rulers hired

bounty hunters to rid their northern neighborhood of the frightening gator-men threat. It became a booming business for a few decades, but the gator men outbred the bounty hunters, causing the hunt to become excessively perilous—for the bounty hunters.

Once the losses due to the bounty hunters had been greatly reduced, the gator men quickly turned against the lizard men who populated the Bayou at that time. After a century, lizard men had all but left the ancestral Bayou. Fortunately, the gator men prefer the murky waters of the wetlands and have stopped their territorial expansion at the edges of the Bayou. Since then, the gator men population has stabilized. Diseases and parasites (mostly introduced by the Herathians) and a lack of an adequate nutritional base cause weaker hatchlings to perish.

Occasionally, when the number of gator men increases beyond what the Bayou's ecology can sustain, gator men go on a massive rampage into one of their neighbors' territories, hunting for food and whatever might spark some interest in their thick saurian minds. Gator-man shamans usually spark these raids, on behalf of their patron Immortal, Gorn. These forays are now a sacred ritual in which a warrior presumably gains Gorn's favor by spilling the blood of his foes in

the most savage ways. These raids have become the most frightening and unpredictable calamity the neighboring nations have experienced. Bringing back food is of course useful to the community, but all the shamans instinctively understand that the true goal of these raids is to limit the gator-man population lest the gator men feed upon each other.

Some trading does occur between the gator men and their mysterious neighbors in the Grassland Wilderness, however. A gator-man shaman once noticed that if he forgot or abandoned something at the southwestern edge of the swamp, the next day something else might be there, usually something of use. After a century, gator men have come to believe that the spirit of Gorn takes these goods and repays the gator men with something else.

Of course, there is no such arrangement. In fact, several nomadic tribes of chameleon men inhabit these grasslands. Chameleon men are difficult to spot among the tall grasses prevailing there. The first "trade" was an accidental one, when a chameleon man found a gator man's huge stone ax. He was so surprised he left his backpack on the site and walked back to his camp with his discovery. Over the years, chameleon men found out that if they left something of value after picking up a gator-man item, soon more gator-man objects would be found

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DRAGON 51

there. So it became a regular trade with the unwitting gator men. Spots have become known for the kinds of items expected to be found there. In some areas, food is traded; in others it could be weapons, shells, or ornamental stones.

The positive side of all this is that gator men *never* raid or even dare venture into the grasslands, for they are thought to be Gorn's home, a land taboo to all upon pain of death. The chameleon men understand this quite well. Using their camouflage ability, chameleon men do their best to preserve these gator-man beliefs. This provides them with some wealth and a much-appreciated immunity against the gator men's fearsome endemic raids.

The gator-man monarchs have established themselves by sheer savagery and cruelty. Their rule is based on fear, brutality, and the support of the shamans. The gator man who acts in the most heroic and gruesome fashion during the latest foray into neighboring lands may challenge the current ruler. For this he must have equalled or bested the present ruler's savagery during such raids—at least three shamans must testify to such "heroism." If the challenger then defeats the ruler, the challenger establishes a new, hereditary dynasty (until another challenger comes up). This is what happened when Ator defeated acting monarch King Osh III. She killed the aging king, crowned herself Queen Ator I, thus supplanting the Oshite dynasty with her own Atorite dynasty, and renamed the nation the Kingdom of Ator. She has ruled for fifteen years since. Should she die unchallenged or undefeated (she barely avoided death during Halde-mar's escape from Gurr'ash's eastern quarter), one of her heirs would become King or Queen Ator II. For the moment, the queen has ordered 100 cay-men to be captured and brought back as slaves for the reconstruction of the destroyed quarter of Gurr'ash. A war is in the making between the kingdoms of Cay and Ator.

Kingdom of Cay — Capital: Tu'eth (pop.: 8,900 cay-men); ruler: Queen Ssa'a IV "Silver Tail," daughter of Queen Roha'a II; Tribal domain includes forested land north of the Bayou; patrons: Kutul, Cay.

The last creation of the Herathians was almost a success. Backing away from the gigantic and deadly gator men, Herathians produced the small cay-men. They were bred to become slaves and builders, smart enough to understand construction plans, agile and quick enough to do the job well and without delay, and small enough to make them weaker than their guards and easy to control.

That plan almost worked, except that the cay-men weren't as bright as expected and were terribly pretentious in addition. Their pride would get in the way when a construction flaw needed correction, or when the cay-men simply disagreed with the architects! Endless bickering separated the Herathian architects from their cay-

men servants. In the long run, cay-men deliberately allowed flaws to remain in the Herathian monuments, without alerting the architects. Exasperated by a rash of catastrophes, Herathians gave up on the lizardkin experiments, and dumped the cay-men north of the Bayou.

The building skills of the present-day cay-men are rather outré. They were never bred to become architects, yet cay-men still attempt to build things to prove they are better than the kin of Shazak and Ator. Their lack of understanding of sound architecture and engineering has led the cay-men to erect such dubious structures as the Great Citadel of Cay (see "The City of Tu'eth"). These constructions do get in the way of raiding gator men who don't know any better, but they wouldn't last long against the experienced military of Bellayne or Herath. But that's beside the point. Cay-men are still very proud of their accomplishments.

The people of Cay copied the social structure of the other demihuman kingdoms and established their own monarchy. Queen Ssa'a presently rules the nation. She has been behind the cay-men expansion into the open lands north of the forests around Rleeh'z and Hwool. There, the cay-men have learned a very primitive way of raising herds of wild aurochs. For this, they domesticated small lizardlike striders that they harness to small war chariots. Cay-men trade some of their auroch meat with the kin of Shazak. Unbeknownst to Herathians, cay-men also trade a little of their red steel, from a mine that is located next to Hwezzah. They are still in the process of learning how to forge metal. Cay-man metal-working is quite primitive, but their wokani are learning.

The City of Tu'eth —excerpt from the scrolls of Raman Nabonidus:

"Seen from above, Tu'eth reminded me of halfling burrows. The city was a succession of small hills with wooden doors and round windows. It was an average-sized town, with most of the paths winding inward, more or less toward a small mesa, about 50' high, in the middle.

"At the center around the mesa stood the Great Citadel of Cay. It was an amazingly rickety assemblage of planks, tree trunks, bamboo, stones, ropes, leather, nets, and random portions of adobe walls with arrow slits, all of which contrived to form a 20' palisade. Several towers of respectable height (but debatable stability) overlooked the palisade at rather unpredictable intervals. Rope bridges, catwalks, and flimsy-looking drawbridges hung just about everywhere, running from one level to another like some sort of mad, three-dimensional maze. Surely, if an enemy ever climbed up the palisade, it would not be able to get back down the other side, for it would be hopelessly lost.

"This 'monument' of cay-men military architecture stretched for miles around the mesa, up and down the hills and crags,

using large trees and boulders as anchor points. A 15' wide moat full of muck surrounded the extraordinary creation. At the center of citadel, within the mesa, lay the queen's burrows."

Patron Immortals

Cay — (alias Terra), cay-men's patroness: Cay represents earth, but also life, fertility, and good luck. Cay is one of the Immortals whom the Herathian experiments on humans and other beings angered. She felt that creating a new race was truly admirable, but debilitating already existing ones in the process was odious. She caused the cay-men to become useless to the Herathians by making them too proud and limiting their building skills (see the *Codex of the Immortals*, in the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set).

Gorn — (alias Demogorgon), gator men's patron: Gorn is the gator men's embodiment of evil and destruction. It was Demogorgon who interfered in the Herathian experiments on gator men. He's the one responsible for instilling in the gator men's minds the racial instincts that make them brutal and bloodthirsty. He's also the one at the source of the gator-man revolt against Herath. For the warlike gator men, Gorn is the patron of victory, bravery, and ultimately death (see the *Codex of the Immortals*, in the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set).

Ka'ar — (alias Ka the Preserver), lizard-men's patron: Ka was the first Immortal to observe the Herathian experiments on humans and dragons. He felt that the creation of new races by mere mortals was blasphemous; this privilege was reserved for Immortals only. Ka also feared what a cross between dragons and humans might produce, so he caused several of the species' undesirable traits to become those of the lizard men. Korotiku, the Immortal patron of Herath, remained neutral on this issue and did not intervene. Ka then became the lizard men's protector, hoping to make them better creatures once they gained their freedom. However, his views caused the more warlike breeds to leave the Bayou, leaving behind those more inclined to improve. Ka became the patron of trade, wealth, and a better life (see the *Codex of the Immortals*, in the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set).

Kutul — (alias Kurtulmak), cay-men's patron: The Shining One was a late comer to the scene. He saw in the cay-men an opportunity for increasing the number of his followers. At that time, the cay-men were poor warriors at best. Kutul contrived to have them create a caste of warriors headed by shamans devoted to him. Kutul now shares the leadership of the cay-men with Cay, she taking care of the growth of their population, and he acting as the patron of war, fire, and territorial gains. He also balances Cay's annoying lawfulness with his own brand of chaos (see the *Codex of the Immortals*, in the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set).



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Squamous ones as PCs

The best way to use any of the three races presented in this article would be to borrow the character-advancement system given in GAZ10 *Orcs of Thar*. The experience points are given in the Squamous Ones Table.

Note that Constitution bonuses should be added only when a PC is created and every time it gains a new level, up to 9th level. None of these creatures have any special abilities (see "Miscellaneous").

Young lizardkin (i.e., player characters when they are first rolled up) each start with a relatively low intelligence score, as shown on the Intelligence table below. Don't forget to reward good role-playing of truly "primitive" characters!

Intelligence		
Race	Starting	Max.
Common lizard men	1d4+2	8
Shazak's kin	1d4+2	12
All cay-men	1d4+2	14
All gator men	1d4+2	10

Each time one of these PCs gains a level, an Intelligence check should be rolled on 1d20. If the check is *failed*, the PC gains a point of Intelligence, up to the racial limits given in the Intelligence table. In other words, PCs gain in Intelligence as they gain levels, but the gain becomes increasingly harder to achieve.

Shamans & wokani: Should the character decide to become a spell-caster, the experience table of the lizardkin will have to be recalculated, incorporating the experience points requirements listed below. The indicated XP have to be gained *before* actually acquiring the corresponding spell-casting level. This means that one cannot start with a spell-casting character when the PC is created.

Spell-casting level	Extra XP required
1	1,000 XP
2	2,000 XP
3	4,000 XP
4	8,000 XP
5	16,000 XP
6	32,000 XP

For example, if a 3rd-level cay-man wanted to become a 1st-level spell-caster upon reaching his next level, he would need to reach a total of 16,000 XP instead of 15,000.

In order to cast spells, a shaman must have a wisdom of 9 or better. A wokan needs an Intelligence of 9 or better. All spell-casters must be at least 1st level in their race to be able to cast spells. For all lizardkin, levels in spell-casting are limited to S6 and W4, as per standard rules on monster spell-casters, page 215-216 in the *Rules Cyclopedia*.

Languages: Many of the sounds used

in lizardkin expression are difficult to reproduce with a human's vocal cords. In general, names are very short, one or two syllables at most. Gator men use anything that sounds like chewing, ripping, rumbling, and other throat noises along with deep voices. Lizard men prefer clicks, rattles, snaps, and generally raspy near-human voices. Cay-men hiss, wheeze, sneeze, whistle, hum, purr, or use a weak, lispy voice when communicating with humans.

Body language is used in conjunction with spoken words. For example, all of the squamous ones use slight movements of their tails as punctuation or signs of courtesy and respect. Greater movements of their tails express deeper emotions. Lizard men also use quick motions of their forked tongues when thinking or when suspicious of something.

Miscellaneous: All lizardkin instinctively know how to swim. Lizard men can hold their breath as long as normal humans. Cay-men can stay underwater without discomfort up to three minutes, gator men up to five minutes. All lizardkin can hide in swamp vegetation (30% chance, at least 10' away from observer).

Lizardkin all have *infravision* and, for simplicity's sake, a natural armor class of 7. Addition of any armor of AC7 or worse only improves the lizardkin's natural AC by a +1 bonus. Shields work as usual. For armor of AC6 or better, use the AC rating of the armor worn, with a +1 bonus.

For those nit-pickers who demand to have gator men with the standard natural AC of 3, it may be better to allow AC7 at level -3, AC5 at level -2, AC4 at level -1, and finally AC3 at level 0 (adult tribesman). Likewise, when first created, a gator man's bite causes only 1d4 points of damage. At higher levels, the bite inflicts 1d6 points of damage for every 2 HD, rounded down. Thus, the most damage any gator man's bite could inflict would be 6d6 points.

Cay-men and gator men can be found in AC9 *Creature Catalogue*, pages 33 and 37. The Neh-Thalggu is a creature from the outer planes, also known as the fearsome Brain Collector (see page 62 of the *Creature Catalogue*). Standard game statistics are abbreviated here for your convenience.

Cay-man: AC 7, HD 2, MV 90' (30'), 120' (40') swimming, AT 1 bite or weapon, D 1-4 or by weapon, Save F1, ML 8 (9), TT K, AL N, XPV 20. Size: 1' tall.

Gator man: AC 3, HD 7, MV 120' (40'), 180' (60') swimming, AT 1 bite or weapon, D 3-18 or by weapon +3, Save F7, ML 10, TT M, AL C, XPV 450 (weapon damage assumes a strength of 18). Size: 7-8' tall.

Neh-Thalggu: AC 2, HD 10*, MV 180' (60'), 120' (40') swimming, AT 1 bite or spells, D 1-20 or by spell, Save F10, ML 10, TT C, AL C, XPV 1,750. Can cast up to 12 wizard spells, levels one to three, chosen at random.

Squamous Ones Table

Level	Cay-man		Lizard man		Gator man	
	XP	HD	XP	HD	XP	HD
-3	—	—	—	—	-63,000	1
-2	—	—	—	—	-47,250	3
-1	-1,000	1d8	-1,200	d8+1	-31,500	5
0	0	2d8	0	2d8+1	0	7d8
1	1,000	3d8	1,200	3d8 +2	63,000	8d8
2	3,000	4d8	3,600	4d8 +3	189,000	9d8
3	7,000	—	8,400	—	441,000	—
4	15,000	5d8	18,000	5d8+3	741,000	10d8
5	31,000	6d8	37,200	6d8 +4	1,041,000	11d8
6	63,000	7d8	75,600	7d8 +4	1,341,000	12d8
7	129,000	—	152,400	—	1,641,000	—
8	259,000	8d8	306,000	8d8+5	1,941,000	13d8
9	519,000*	+2 hp**	606,000*	+2 hp**	2,241,000*	+2 hp**

* + 300,000 XP per extra level.
** +2 hit point per level, constitution bonus no longer applies.

Abilities	Str	Wis	Dex	Con	Cha
Race Max.	18	16	18	18	18*
Lizard man	+1	-1	—	—	—
Cay-man	-1	-1	+2	—	—
Gator man	+2	-2	—	+1	-1

* Charisma applies only between creatures of the same race; penalize Charisma -2 when dealing with humanoids, and -5 when dealing with demihumans or humans. The natural -1 penalty to gator men's Charisma reflects the difficulty gator men have in getting along with each other.



The Coral Kingdom

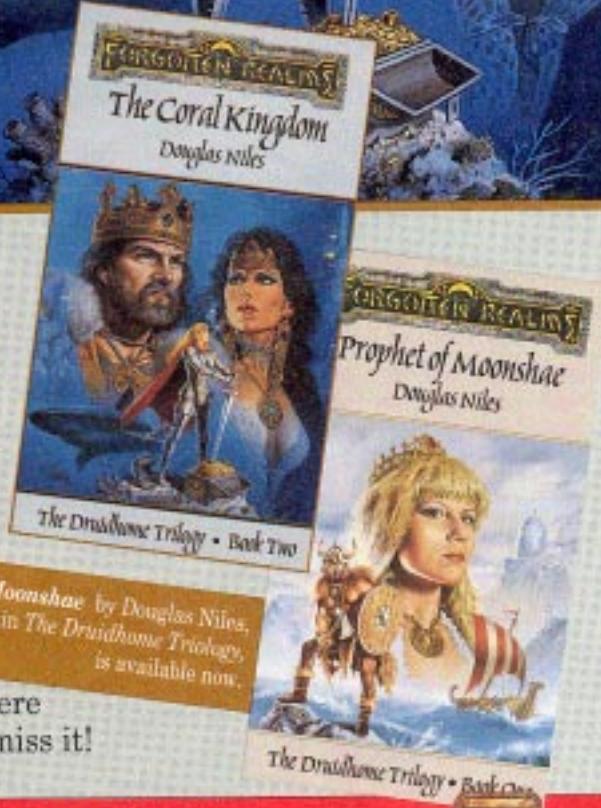


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Magic in the Evening

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The meeting of master mages: Elminster and Mordenkainen!

I was there when it all started.

My role wasn't glamorous: I spent an uncomfortable evening inside an old suit of armor, hanging from hooks on the wall as sweat ran down and dripped very slowly off the end of my nose. I didn't dare move an inch, and I nearly suffocated from the heat and thickening smoke in that little study, yet I stuck it out. I'd given Elminster my word to be silent, and I *did* want to live to see morning.

The Old Mage had been most insistent. The inside of the spell-shielded armor was the only place our powerful visitor wouldn't detect me in his first four breaths or so. We were in a cozy study in—well, I'm not allowed to tell you exactly where. Wizards are perhaps the most paranoid people alive—which, I suppose, is why some of them are still alive.

It began with our usual evening chat. After dining, Elminster blew smoke rings. I was watching, drowsing in the big armchair, when the Old Mage looked beyond me and asked calmly, "Are ye in the mood for some danger this night, friend scribe?"

I looked all around, but no one else had slipped into the room while I wasn't looking. He was talking to me. "Of course," I lied, then took a big gulp of cider.

Elminster waited, until it was just going down my gullet, and said, "Good. Ye have just time to set thy infernal recorders and get into the armor before his arrival. That way, ye *might* live to see the morn—but no promises, now." He watched me choke and sputter, and he grinned like the wizard he was.

Later, as I closed my eyes and sighed in the hollow darkness of the bolted-down helm, Elminster murmured, "No noise, if

ye would live." He strode across the room with agility surprising for his years, crooked a finger as he settled himself in my armchair—and a whole row of bottles rose from the cabinet across the room and followed him.

A wave of his hand extinguished the lights, leaving only the leaping glow of the fire. The Old Mage wiggled two fingers, and my best crystal glasses floated down over his shoulder. He studied the bottles, sighed, and made a "come hither" gesture. I heard the fridge door pop open and slam again—and wasn't surprised when a large, frosty bottle of cola drifted into view. He filled two glasses, and one obediently slid across the table toward the empty seat.

A moment later, it wasn't empty anymore. Without a sound or any warning flicker, burst of smoke, or dazzle of lights to herald his arrival, a middle-aged man with a wise, craggy face sat there, clad in high-collared but rather wrinkled gray robes. His face was alert and almost angry, like a hawk looking about for prey.

His beard was black, shot through with gray, close-trimmed and waxed-unlike Elminster's full, shaggy chin-mane. He nodded a greeting and reached for the glass in front of him. Little lights seemed to dance across the liquid for a moment, and he frowned faintly.

"What's this?" he asked in a deep, melodic voice.

"A carbonated, sugared drink popular in this place," Elminster replied. "Think of it as purified, sweetened water. Twill give ye gas in plenty, but no headache or worse. Well met, Morden."

Mordenkainen the Mage nodded and almost smiled. "Fair greeting, old man.

Khelben said you were oft found here."

"A place beyond the Realms of my cares," Elminster replied dryly, as the floating bottle silently refilled his glass. "As my days draw on, I increasingly feel a need to relax."

Mordenkainen snorted. "I've not noticed creeping old age slowing your works, as I walk the worlds, El. Here you are and there, always meddling."

Elminster shrugged. "I've been at it a day or two longer than thee."

Mordenkainen smiled. "One or two, perhaps." He held up his empty glass, and the bottle obediently started toward it. "Still battling the mighty evil ones?" he asked quietly, making a certain sign with two fingers.

Elminster waved a hand in reply. "This place is shielded against them. Ye may speak plainly. And, aye, the old struggle rolls along. I'd miss it, if one side or the other ever prevailed."

"Certes, were the winning side to be the other one," Mordenkainen returned dryly. "Good stuff, this." He belched suddenly, his brows drawing together in a dark frown. "Your warning was not lightly given." He looked around—and the flames of the fire were suddenly a shimmering violet.

Elminster nodded appreciatively, though to my eyes it made both mages look bone-white dead, and said, "I'll set thy curiosity at rest ere more time slides away beneath us, Lord Mage. Art grows ever wilder on both our worlds, and all the planes between. More than that; with each day that passes, we meet with more beings who wield Art, be they hedge-wizards, slithering tentacled things, or mighty mages hitherto hidden."

Mordenkainen nodded. "This is so," he agreed, gesturing for the Old Mage to continue. His glass seemed to have emptied itself again.

"Growing, too, are the numbers of those who have the power to walk the worlds, as we do, by Art, from plane to plane, and by sailing the stars. Things ever rush on faster-and ever they grow more linked, events that befall on Toril affecting ye in Oerth, what befalls on Krynn telling on both our worlds, and so on. Ye have seen it-there's no need to look well."

Mordenkainen nodded. "I follow your thoughts, El. This is the place where you tell that young lad all the secrets-and other things best left unsaid-of Faerun. I've seen the written results a time or two." He gestured meaningfully; a few modules and boxed sets on a high shelf shifted uneasily.

Elminster merely nodded. His pipe rose from the side table by the fireplace and drifted toward him.

Mordenkainen saw it and snapped his fingers; a slim, dark cigar was suddenly between them. As I watched, a spark leaped up from the fire and raced through the air to land upon its tip. He puffed and through the rising smoke said, "You think we'd both be better served, Old Mage, if we met from time to time and spoke of things on Oerth, Toril, and Krynn, and so laid bare small things and large befalling our worlds."

"Exactly," Elminster said, as the pipe settled gently in one corner of his mouth.

"A good idea," the Mage of Greyhawk went on. "I'm pleased that we can trust each other this far." He fell silent, and they stared levelly into each others' eyes for a long, cold moment.

Flames seemed to leap and whirl in Elminster's eyes, just for an instant. "Aye," he said. "Krynn . . . whom can we trust, to speak for that world? Mirthful old Fizban is gone, and we know now-too late-what he truly was."

"And young, damned Raistlin is gone, and we know him for what *he* was as well." Mordenkainen sighed deeply.

"There is another," said Elminster, "one who may yet prove to be as twisted and arrogant with Art as Raistlin, and perhaps as dangerous: young Dalamar. I know little more of him than that he has taken the place Raistlin held as head of the Order of Black Robes in the Conclave of Wizards. He has shown an exceptional interest in things beyond the reaches of Krynn-unusual for such an insular world."

Mordenkainen shrugged. "Over too many years, I have grown tired of turning back the clawing spells of young and arrogant boys and maids alike, filled to bursting with the little spells they've mastered, who think to prove their superiority over all the graybeards they can reach. Yet, no meeting in life is without risk. If this one can resist the temptation to try to impress us too much (and better yet, refrain from trying to wrest power from us), I am not

adverse to adding him to our gatherings of converse."

He frowned and added, "Mind you, three are always more trouble together than two. There's little to be gained if we merely set him a-scheming or rouse his ire enough to make of him an enemy whose interest or malice extends to meddling o'ermuch in the affairs of our worlds."

Elminster nodded, slowly. "I had given thought to such things, ere we met." His brow wrinkled, and I heard the fridge door pop open again. A second cola bottle then came into view. Elminster raised his own glass invitingly. "Here, then, to a dream: to the Wizards Three."

Mordenkainen snorted. "Hadn't we best save the toast until this Dalamar sits among us? Behaving himself, too."

Elminster smiled slowly. "His thirst for magic was enough that he abandoned his home and dark elven kin to serve under Raistlin. What greater lure could there be, to his coming-and his best behavior, at least at first-than two archmages with Art such as we command, who know the lore underlying what they wield?"

Mordenkainen matched the smile. "True. First, he'll want to impress us. Then . . ."

"Snatch all the Art he can, that which we let slip," Elminster finished the thought. "So we'll merely take some care with what we let slip, and steer him."

"A good thought, this idea of yours," Mordenkainen said, looking at the fire (which obediently returned to its normal hue, under his gaze), "especially if there's such a thing as popcorn around this place. Let's talk now of small and frivolous things as well as larger matters. I grow weary of pompous, saving-all-that-is pronouncements."

Elminster nodded. "So did I, back before Myth Drannor fell. They've started to grow a little more fun again, I must admit; 'tis all in how ye view them, I believe."

He stirred. "And aye, there's popcorn." Out in the kitchen, the squeaky cupboard door opened obediently. "We've a breath or three yet, before it's ready."

Mordenkainen nodded. "So speak. Prof'er some tidbit of magic, some trifle of Realmslore. I'll trade you one in return, and perhaps we can go on from there."

Elminster nodded. "Where to begin? Ah -this'll interest ye. Last week, I chanced across Thundaerl of Tethyr. Ye remember him from Magefairs of old? The first archmage to earn coins in a king's court as a master chef?"

Mordenkainen nodded. "Ah, yes. We of the Circle paid him a visit once-cloaked with spells, of course-and he fed us most excellent pastries."

Elminster smiled. "He's made more money than most of us will ever see, these past dozen winters in Selgaunt, devising pastries, sauces, and delicacies for the finer palate and heavier purse. He proudly showed me his latest spell: his *universal taster*, he calls it. It's attuned to the one who casts it, revealing to his eyes-even in

the dark, and through sauces and even within meat-any substance that would be harmful in the quantities present for the caster to ingest."

"Taints, poisons?" Mordenkainen didn't seem overly impressed.

"Aye, but there's more. If ye be the server of the food, and such dangers are present, your food seems to change appearance, slim black serpents bursting up out of it to hiss and grin at ye. Illusory, of course-but an embarrassing tip-off that he knows thy game is up. Of course, the snakes give him clear excuse for destroying the tainted provender with a spell or two, without offending others at table."

Mordenkainen grinned. "That does sound amusing. If you can pry the incantation out of him . . ."

"Rest assured, I shall. No time promises, mind ye."

The Mage of Greyhawk looked thoughtful. "I've news of more import-to me, at least-but less specifics. Someone, it is certain, is trying to slay those of the Circle."

Elminster's brows knitted suddenly. "The Circle of Eight? Thy own Circle?"

Mordenkainen nodded soberly. "Tenser and Bigby have both been attacked-by magic, worked by someone strong enough to conceal his, her, or its identity; someone of Oerth, or who has studied our ways."

Elminster spread his hands. His pipe wagged expressively, from side to side. "That could be any astute mage who sailed in on the Flow or who walked the planes and laid low to look about."

"Dalamar again?" Mordenkainen's voice was quiet. Out in the kitchen, the fridge door was heard again. "Perhaps we wrong him," he added, more vigorously. "In affairs of magic, it is especially easy to find a single likely foe and blame everything on him."

Elminster nodded. "True indeed. Yet ye seem sure, at least, that ye face a mage or mages and not something else-say, an illithid, or one who uses the mind as we do Art, or one who walks in shadows."

The mage of Oerth calmly watched a fresh cola bottle fill his glass. "No-none of those would act as this foe has. Tenser, at least, is shrewd enough in the ways of adventurers to smell out any ruse. If one such was trying to make his attacks look like those of a mage of Oerth, he would see through it." He sipped cola and shrugged. "But enough of this matter. Our problems are our own."

"My thanks for thy warning," Elminster said, looking at his empty glass. The cola bottle obediently floated his way. "Perhaps I should tell thee of the doings of those who deem themselves important in Art, in Faerun."

"Such as the Zhentarim?" Mordenkainen smiled. "Such dolts-each tale of them is more amusing than the last." He looked at the cola left in his glass. "Do they still hunt spellfire?"

Elminster lowered his eyes. "That tale's end is yet unknown." He then looked

across the table; instead of their customary merry blue, his eyes seemed steel gray. "I would not speak of it, yet."

Mordenkainen merely inclined his head. The Old Mage nodded in reply. "My thanks. I will say more, another time. No, I thought to tell ye of deeds in the desert, Anauoch, where the Zhentarim sought—nay, seek, I fear, as once a plan's in their stone heads, 'tis slow indeed to fade away—where they seek to slay or bribe their way through all the Bedine tribes and rule over all. One outcast 'witch' of the Bedine—Ruha, a sorceress of middling power, who wields wind and sand spells-raised tribes against them and hurled them back."

Mordenkainen regarded the last of his cola. "Word had reached me that thy Harpers had something to do with this Ruha's victory."

"Something," Elminster agreed. "Yet only one Harper was there, and he died in the doing. All he did was turn this Ruha to do what was already in her power, to resist the Zhentarim—she and the Bedine tribes who might otherwise have spurned her."

Mordenkainen raised his eyebrows. "What are these Bedine, that they can stand against Zhentarim magic? I'd heard them to be camel-riders, mere nomad savages—and that the Zhentarim sent lizard-warriors to swing more swords against them than the Bedine could raise."

Elminster smiled. "Thy information is good. In answer, consider ye the difference between these two statements: I have heard a Harper say, 'Life is a series of challenges—to be met and dealt with.' I have also heard a Bedine warrior of gray years say, 'Life is a series of battles, to be fought and won.'"

Mordenkainen smiled. "I see. The Zhents met a Bedine tribe and found a rampart of man-flesh that hurled their careless might of Art back and stood patiently waiting for more."

"Exactly." Elminster grinned at a memory. "I was in an tavern in Hill's Edge recently—The Banshee At Bay, 'tis called, and I especially recommend the baked stirge on toast. A Zhentarim mageling swaggered in, threatening everyone in the place and demanding the best food and wine in the same breath. The tavern master was an old Bedine with one leg, taken as a slave when young and too old now to fight the desert. He just listened, spat on the table when Lord High-and-Mighty was done, and went into the back room. When he came back, he was carrying a silver tray with a domed lid. He set it down in front of the Zhentarim. When the lad lifted the lid, everyone in the place saw the four old skulls on the tray. The old man told him that they were what was left of the last four Zhentarim wizards foolish enough to threaten him. Then one of the skulls grew an eyeball, and winked at the mageling. He ran."

The two archmages chuckled, together. "The Bedine's a wizard?"

Elminster shook his head. "Nay—his

daughter is, though; I saw her work the trick with a *wand of illusion*, behind a curtain."

"And the Zhent didn't come back that night, with a hand-count of hireswords, to work mischief?"

Elminster grinned. "He might well have done it. Aye, ye have the true measure of the Zhentarim. I probably persuaded him not to do so." He crooked a finger, and one of the other bottles on the table slid toward his empty glass. "I laid a little spell that kept a skull grinning at him, from just behind his shoulder, all that night. A floating skull, with two twinkling eyes, that never left him."

"An illusion?"

"Aye—a special one, that reflects back *dispel magic* spells at the caster."

Mordenkainen burst into open laughter. "Another useful magic," he said when he was done. "I'll have to bring something comparable to trade, next time."

Elminster nodded. "See ye do; I've not collected a spell from Oerth for a long time, now."

Mordenkainen snapped his fingers. "That reminds me—I've news of direct interest to you. Remember Ilphara?"

Elminster rolled his eyes. "I could hardly forget her. It's not every 'prentice who thinks herself powerful enough to charm *me* into mooning after a princess of Cormyr!"

Mordenkainen raised an eyebrow. "Did she succeed?" he asked his glass (which was nearly empty again).

Elminster grinned. "Oh, I pretended she had."

Mordenkainen laughed again. "Ah, it's rare to find such fun, these days, among the ambitious young magelings of Oerth. They're all so busy conquering the world." He shook his head. "But I was about to tell you what Ilphara's up to now." He beckoned, and a bottle slid his way. "Ilphara, the minx, has worked charms on at least seven merchants of the City of Greyhawk. Now they undercharge each other guilds and all be hanged, and work hand-in-hand to make her rich. She lies there in a silken-draped bed, growing fat and lazy, while they work themselves thin."

Elminster whistled. "Does she still have those jet-black eyes?"

Mordenkainen nodded. "As beautiful as ever, Old Mage. Fatter, though, as I said. But she's heading for a fall; some of the merchants got suspicious of these onetime rivals working such friendly trade, and they hired some spell-hurlers to find and knock down any *charms* or shady business. So sweet Ilphara hired some knife-in-the-backs to cut short a few wizardly careers."

Elminster looked at the ceiling. "And the Circle of Eight felt, ah, compelled to take action?"

Mordenkainen nodded. "Precisely. I've spent an enjoyable evening, before I came here, weaving *spelldreams* for the merchants. They'll be shown everything she's

done to them, as the spells slowly unravel her spells. When they're all broken at once, she won't know whom to face down first—particularly as she'll be too busy dealing with her own hired killers. I've made them think she's set them all up for the fatal sort of double-dealing. Moreover, though he doesn't know it, the best of them's wearing Samander's ring."

Mordenkainen drank, then answered the unspoken question. "The ring is a bauble I picked up a few years back. A waiting-spell will whisk it back to me before the wearer gets into too much trouble, and its own magicks prevent anyone from feeling it on his finger—or anyone else from detecting it, while it's there. All it does is counteract any order given to a *charmed* wearer, so if Ilphara tries to control him when he comes to slay her, her spell will work but he'll act as he pleases, probably contrary to any order she gives!"

Elminster grinned. "It sounds as if ye mean to give Ilphara exactly what she deserves. I did teach her that magical mischief always rebounds, if ye fall into lazy and cruel habits."

Mordenkainen stroked his beard. "You've unleashed many a mage on both our worlds, to follow or ignore your teachings. It's a credit to you that I hear of so few going wrong."

"Base flattery," Elminster reproved wryly. "I'm not so young as to need that sort of thing, ye know—or not to recognize it."

Mordenkainen chuckled, as another bottle floated his way. "Ah, I'm going to enjoy these gatherings. Have you such a thing about as the makings of a sandwich? In this world, once, I was introduced to something called 'mayo' that almost made up for the horribly transformed material they tried to pass off as meat in the same sandwich."

Elminster nodded. "I know just what ye mean" Out in the kitchen, there was a sudden tumult of opening and slamming drawers, crinkling wrappings, chopping knives, twirling jar lids, and the like. He looked apologetically in my direction, then went on, "My turn for news, I recall. Hmm . . . ah. Ye knew Tsunroon, did ye not?"

"Tsunroon the Traveler? The one who had a tower in the Drachensgrabs, and blasted it to dust when his apprentices tried to rob him, with them inside?"

"Aye. Ye know he went walking the worlds for a time, after that?"

Mordenkainen nodded. "He's back in the Flanaess now, around Niole Dra."

Elminster sucked on his pipe. "Aye. Not surprising he's scuttled for home. He ran afoul of the Alhoon in the Realms not long ago."

"The Alhoon?"

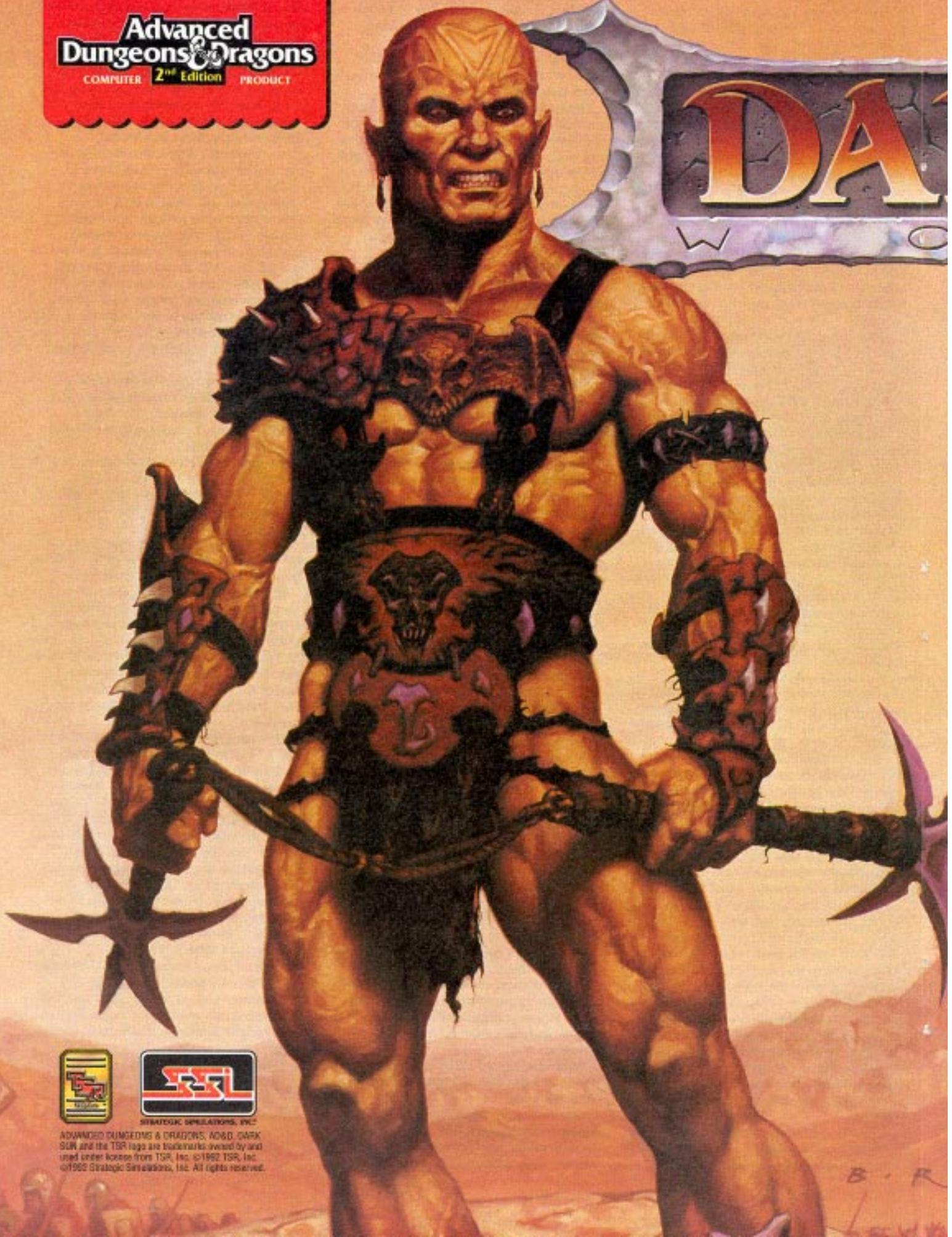
"Ye have never . . . Hmm. Well, look ye: They be at least nine, and all wear purple robes with red sashes. Methinks they came out of some far crystal sphere; at least, I never heard a whisper of them,

Continued on page 62

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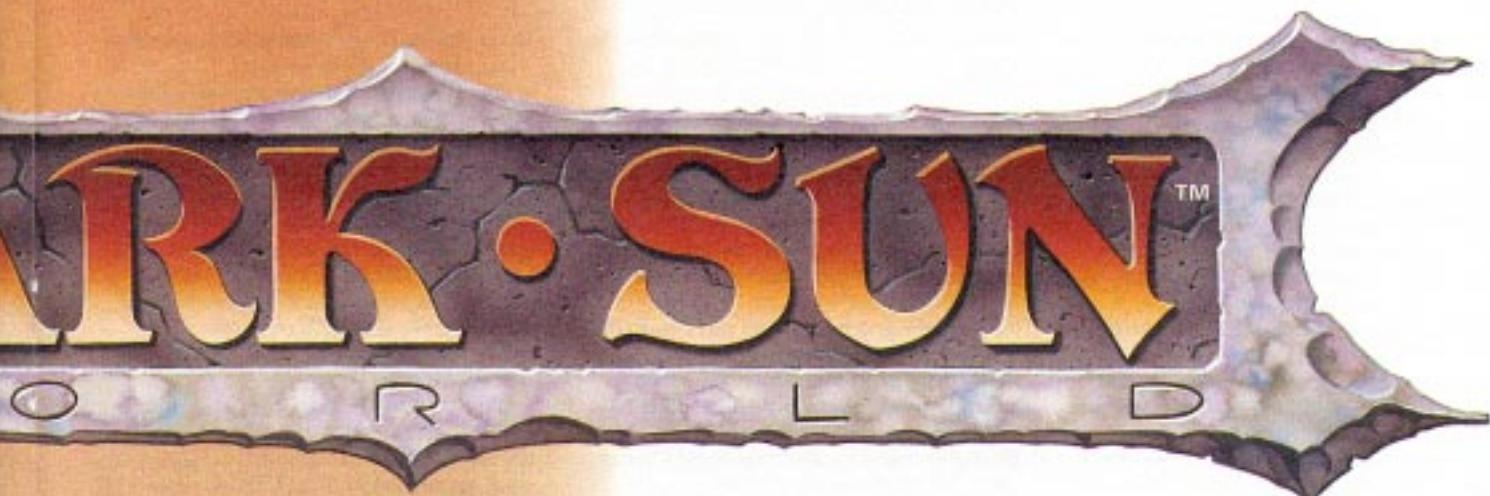
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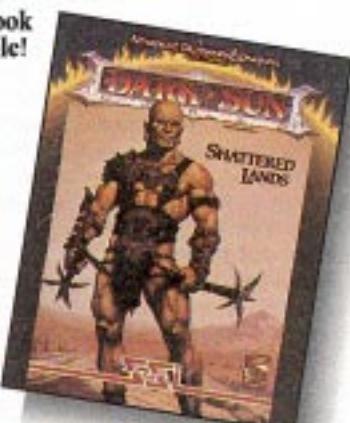


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until a few winters back in Faerun. Picture illithids—illithids who wield both Art and mind-powers, and who've mastered magic enough to attain lichdom."

Mordenkainen stared. "Mind-flayer liches?"

Elminster nodded. "We call them illithiliches; they call themselves the Alhoon. They're nigh impossible, gods know, to hunt down. They're worse to have as enemies, as ye might guess."

Mordenkainen nodded. "Should we be wary on Oerth?"

Elminster shrugged. "Now that ye know . . . tell the Circle, of course, and keep an eye open. They've not yet found Tsunroon's trail to Oerth, I'm sure—or none of this'd be news to ye, and it's the Traveler's gory death ye would be telling me of. Nay, they're too busy trying to slaughter all the local Zhentarim, so they can see their way clear to rule Faerun."

Mordenkainen snorted. "Do evil mages ever seek to do anything else? You'd think they'd have the imagination to find some other trail of interest to spend their lives exploring!"

Elminster spread his hands. "Recall, ye, that they and their kind give us something to do: saving the world from their various intended tyrannies!"

Mordenkainen smiled ruefully. "I suppose that's the best long view to take of it, El. Still . . . nevermind."

Elminster smiled back, then turned. "Ah, here come the sandwiches—I took the liberty of using something they call a 'microwave,' here. Ye haven't lived until ye have had hot cheese, and bacon—and even hot mayo—together!" He raised a hand as a floating tray glided gently to his elbow, bearing its steaming burden.

While they ate, Elminster continued, around mouthfuls. "I recently spent a night at the High House of Stars—a temple to Selune in Faerun, tucked away on a mountainside near Neverwinter. One of the priestesses is an old friend of mine, from when we were adventurers together—but that's another tale. She told me of Tsunroon dropping in on them recently. *Teleported* right into the midst of their moonrise service, scorched and smoking from fire-spell attacks, and collapsed on the spot.

"They nursed him, of course—after they'd raised a *moonweb* over him to foil any pursuit. Sure enough, one of the Alhoon had traced him somehow, and 'ported in after him a few breaths later. But one of the things a *moonweb* does is veil all sight of the place or person it's guarding. The other thing it does is hurl ye (and any spell ye hurl) right back where ye started from—with the magic ye used burned and gone."

Elminster regarded the crumbs on his empty tray thoughtfully. "Another thing a *moonweb* does is allow the caster a clear mind-picture of anyone—or anything—that tries to pass it. The Sisters of Selune all knew what he was running from. They

patched him up in a hurry and got him to a *gate* out in the wilderlands, where it wasn't likely anyone would be questing after him with seeking-spells. From there he obviously hurried to thy home ground."

Mordenkainen looked thoughtful. "These Alhoon sound like the sort of trouble that might just find a way to follow him. Once in Oerth, they'll swiftly be a problem needing my attention. My thanks, Old Mage."

Elminster grunted. "Twas not a problem."

Mordenkainen smiled again, visibly relaxed. "A good idea, this, El. I haven't enjoyed myself this much—nor felt so calmed for so long, gods take all—in years. It's a welcome change from always being alert and on stage, saving Oerth."

"Saving Oerth again," Elminster agreed, and they laughed together. Then, slowly, Mordenkainen's hand went out across the table.

Elminster regarded it for a moment, and then stretched out his own, to clasp it firmly. Things fell silent, except for the crackle of the fire, as two archmages nodded at each other.

"I'll be back—as often as we can both spare the time. There's a lot about Oerth I'd like to tell you," Mordenkainen said quietly.

Elminster's eyes twinkled. "So as to save having me wandering about in your back courtyard, rooting it out for myself?" He grinned and added softly, "We should have thought of this years ago."

For your campaign

Readers familiar with events on Oerth will note that this meeting of archmages took place before the events of module WGA4 *Vecna Lives* or the *GREYHAWK® Wars* boxed set. Readers conversant with Toril are advised that the events involving the Bedine mentioned here are detailed in the Harpers novel *The Parched Sea*, by Troy Denning.

I have since wormed information enough out of Elminster to derive rules about the spells, magical item, and monster mentioned in his conversation with Mordenkainen.

Wizard spells

Curse of the grinning skull

(Illusion/Phantasm, Abjuration)

Level: 2

Components: V,S,M

Range: 20 yds.

CT: 1 round

Duration: 1 turn/lvl.

Save: Special

Area of Effect: One creature

This spell, also known as the *ever-watching skull*, creates the illusory image of a grinning human skull with twinkling eyes; it is visible to all. It floats at the shoulder of the victim, looking at him and seeming to react to his actions. It actually moves to always gaze into his eyes, responding to head and eye movements.

From time to time, it moves its jawbone in a soundless, laughing motion.

This image is nothing more than a nuisance. It can serve to scare off a known thief, mark a being so that he can easily be followed through crowds, or anger a wizard into wasting destructive spells on it.

A *grinning skull* reflects all *dispel magic* spells back upon the caster and is not affected by attacks or spells that deal physical damage. All *anti-magic shells* or related spells of fourth or higher level (such as a *minor globe of invulnerability*) will destroy it.

When the spell is cast, the target and the caster each roll 1d20 and add their level to the result. If the caster's total is higher, the skull appears—but if the victim's total is greater, the spell is lost, and a distorted skull appears only momentarily, flickers, and is gone. The spell's material components are a piece of human bone and a spark or flame.

Thundaerl's universal taster

(Greater Divination, Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 2

Components: V,S,M

Range: 30'

CT: 2

Duration: 1 rd. +1 rd./lvl.

Save: None

Area of Effect: Special

This spell allows the caster (only) to look at foods and see any substance harmful to the caster outlined in luminous purple flames (in the quantities present). The magic penetrates darkness, sauces, and solid objects such as lids and layers of meat.

If a harmful substance is present, the caster can will the food to emit illusory, hissing black serpents visible to all. This can alert the provider of the material to the wizards awareness of the threat—or give the caster an excuse for destroying the tainted material along with the dangerous snakes! The material components of this spell are a berry from any poisonous plant (e.g., deadly nightshade) and a piece of snake skin.

Lesser spelldream

(Invocation, Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 4

Components: V,S

Range: 0

CT: 1 turn

Duration: 1 turn/lvl.

Save: Special

Area of Effect: One touched creature

This spell is only effective against sleeping beings. It allows the caster to remove any spells of fourth level or less already in effect on the recipient (such as *charm person* or *change self*). The spell effects are unraveled slowly, without doing harm to the caster of the *spelldream* or the recipient, and without triggering any spell-traps or defensive effects. This occurs during an enforced slumber, which can be broken by any physical attack on the recipient (such an event will jolt the recipi-

ent into instant alertness). This enforced slumber is accompanied by dreams, and the caster of this spell can choose one image per level to feature in these dreams (typically, the caster shapes a sequence of images showing the recipient how they came to be enspelled, or why the caster has chosen to remove those spells).

While a *spelldream* is unfolding in the recipient's mind, his mind cannot be contacted or influenced by any other being. Thus, a wizard can pass information to a recipient who is under magical thought-surveillance without risk of the information being detected.

When the spell is cast, the recipient is allowed a save vs. spells with a -5 penalty. If the save succeeds, the spell is lost, and the intended recipient instantly awakens.

Greater spelldream (Invocation, Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 6

Components: V,S

Range: 1 yd./lvl.

CT: 1 turn

Duration: 1 turn/lvl.

Save: Special

Area of Effect: One touched creature

This spell allows the caster to remove any spells of sixth level or less already in effect on a single chosen spell recipient, who must be visible to the caster or specifically named during spell-casting. Except for the differences noted here, this spell is identical in all respects to a *lesser spelldream*.

Priest spell

Moonweb (Abjuration, Alteration)

Sphere: Guardian

Level: 5

Components: V,S,M

Range: 0

CT: 5

Duration: 2 turns/lvl.

Save: None

Area of Effect: Special

This spell is used by priests of Selune, the Faerun goddess of the moon and stars. It creates a web of glowing, shimmering strands of silvery light. This *moonweb* cannot be seen through (except by priests of Selune, the goddess herself, and the beings in a protected area), but it doesn't foil magical means of detecting or locating beings and objects.

Any being, weapon, or spell striking a *moonweb* is forced, violently and immediately, back to its source. This includes beings trying to circumvent such a barrier by means of *dimension door* or *teleportation* magicks (which are drained and ruined by the *moonweb*). Weapon attacks directed at or through a *moonweb* rebound for full damage on their wielders.

Before rebounding, magical weapons do a *moonweb* 1 hp damage for each "plus" possessed. A *moonweb* can be destroyed by inflicting 1 hp magical damage per level of its caster, or by the application of a *dispel magic* spell.

Moonwebs repel *globes of invulnerability* and other magical barriers, but any contact between a *moonweb* and an *anti-magic shell* or any *prismatic* magic will instantly destroy both spell effects in a spectacular burst of harmless blue sparks and crawling purple lightnings.

If the caster of a *moonweb* is on the same plane of existence as the *moonweb* whenever any being or thing destroys or tries to pass it, the caster gains a clear, vivid mental image of the offending object or being.

This spell affects one touched creature or opening (e.g., a doorway or window) with a surface area of up to one square foot per level. The material components of this spell are a piece of gray or silver hair from any source and a drop of holy water.

Magical item

Samander's ring

Named for the wizard who devised it some 40 winters ago, this rare type of plain brass ring protects a single living being whose bare flesh must be in contact with it. It need not be worn on a finger to work (it can be hidden on one's person).

Samander's ring is enspelled to elude all means of magical detection, even when it bears another spell (such as *Drawmij's instant summons* or other *teleportation* magicks, a *magic mouth*, or *invisibility*). It does not interfere with the workings of magicks cast upon it.

Samander's ring has only one function: It absolutely prohibits any mental control, compulsion, or influence from affecting the mind of its bearer, such as psionic attacks (note that these can still do damage) or orders given to a *charmed* ring-bearer. The bearer is made aware of the details of all such attempts and can therefore pretend to be affected. The ring does not prevent a *charm*, *domination*, or similar enchantment/charm spell from being cast on the ring-bearer, so that the caster may well believe such a spell has succeeded. It has no effect on illusions (including *shadow monsters*). When functioning, *Samander's ring* turns invisible and intangible; it can't be felt, struck, or torn off by purely physical probing.

XP Value: 2,000

GP Value: 12,000 (typical market price in the Realms)

Monster

Alhoon (Illithilich): #APP 1-4; INT Genius (18); AL NE; AC 12; MV 9; HD 8 +4; THAC0 13; #AT 4; Dmg 2d4 or by weapon; SA mind blast, spell use; MR 50%; SZ M (6' tall); ML 17-18; XP 7,000; *Menzoberranzan* boxed set. Treasure: S,T,V × 3 (× 6 in lair).X.

Alhoon are very rare, magic-using outcasts from mind-flayer society who have defied elder-brains to achieve lichdom, becoming "illithiliches." Alhoon look like living mind flayers (mauve-skinned,

octopus-headed humanoids with four mouth-tentacles and three-fingered hands), but their skins are dry and often wrinkled, never glistening with slime.

Alhoon attack with four (AC 7) tentacles, each about 2' long. If successful, each automatically does 1d4 hp damage/round as it bores into the victim. A tentacle dealt 5 or more hp damage in a round will pull out of the victim's body; it will then strike (attack roll required) at a new spot. Tentacles striking areas other than a victim's head can't reach the brain; they do damage for four rounds, then withdraw.

As in life, an illithilich is the equivalent of a 7th-level psionicist, commanding three disciplines, four sciences, and 12 devotions. It has a Power Score of 18 and 1d100 +250 psionic strength points. It attacks with a *mind thrust* and always possess *astral projection*, *body equilibrium* (its only psychometabolic power), *control body*, *domination*, *ESP*, *levitation*, *posthypnotic suggestion*, *probability travel*, and *teleport*. Other abilities are usually present and vary from one individual to another (see PHBR5 *The Complete Psionics Handbook*).

Illithiliches can also cast spells as 9th-level mages (spells: 4, 3, 3, 2, 1), using magicks seized from human mages or found in spell books from tombs. They avidly seek more spells, driven by a hunger for power. An Alhoon can use a spell (plus its tentacle attacks) during any round in which it does not use psionics.

Alhoon spells require material components, but these monsters often modify spells to remove the verbal component by altering the somatic component. Illithiliches can employ all magical items usable by wizards, as well as those open to all classes. Magical items, scrolls, and spell books are the treasures most valued by Alhoon. In the Underdark, they often use gems as currency. (Alhoon hate bright light but venture into the surface world by night or dwell there in caverns, gloomy woods, and ruins.)

Alhoon gain no undead attacks such as a normal lich's *chill touch*, but they do have "standard" undead immunities to *sleep* and *charm* magicks. They can't be turned or dispelled by priests and aren't harmed or impeded by holy water, cold iron, *protection from evil*, sunlight, or silver weapons. They are subject to the effects of magicks that specifically affect undead.

Alhoon have no need for sustenance, but their magic-resistant bodies adapt imperfectly to undead status; they are plagued by tissue desiccation. They counteract this by bathing or by drinking water, soup, alcohol, and other liquids. They need not ingest nutrients; absorbed poisons harm an alhoon but cannot "kill" it (it reaches a minimum of 6 hp from any poison damage, then takes no further damage). Their undead state neutralizes most poisons, healing all poison damage at a rate of 1 hp per round. Alhoon enjoy devouring brains just as they did in life, but need not do so to stay alive.

Role-playing

Reviews

I

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Gaming in style: deluxe role-playing campaign sets



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When I was a kid, I judged the quality of a board game by the number of goodies in the box. The rules were largely irrelevant since I didn't always understand them, and there was rarely anyone around to play with. But I loved to fondle the pieces—the more, the merrier. By this criterion, Parker Brothers' SORRY* game, with a crummy card deck and a few miserable pawns, was a dismal failure, while the CLUE* game, with all those nifty plastic and metal weapons, was a raging success.

Now that I'm a big boy, I'm a bit more demanding about the rules, but I'm still a sucker for goodies. I adore the little airplanes in TSR's BATTLE OF BRITAIN™ game, and my collection wouldn't be complete without Milton Bradley's AXIS AND ALLIES* game, with its multitude of miniature armies. They're both good games,

addictively playable, but I consider that to be a bonus.

The same standards apply to role-playing products. Nothing makes my pulse race faster than a box stuffed with booklets, maps, dice, posters, and record sheets. Maybe it's just wishful thinking to justify all the money I've shelled out for this stuff over the years, but I figure that if publishers are willing to go to the trouble and expense of cramming a box full of extravagant components, it stands to reason that they must have a certain amount of confidence in the game itself.

While my theory may not always hold true (TSR's WORLD OF GREYHAWK™ boxed set was a bit of a dud, as was Milton Bradley's BROADSIDES AND BOARDING PARTIES* board game, despite those great model ships), it certainly applies to the deluxe sets reviewed this month. Though they're from different companies and they support different game systems, they all have two things in common: an abundance of goodies, and terrific play value. They're also among the best RPG products in recent memory. Let the fondling begin!

DARK SUN™ boxed set **** ½

AD&D® 2nd Edition supplement

Boxed set with 96-page *Rules Book*, 96-page *Wanderer's Journal*, 16-page *A Little Knowledge* booklet, two 24-page spiral-bound flip books, one single-sided 21" × 32" map sheet, one 21" × 36" double-sided map sheet, and one 21" × 32" poster

TSR, Inc. \$20

Design: Timothy B. Brown and Troy Denning

Editing: William W. Connors and J. Robert King

Black-and-white art: Brom and Tom Baxa

Color art: Brom

I thought I had this set all figured out the minute I laid eyes on the ads. With a blazing sun over a barren desert landscape, what else could it be but *Lawrence of Arabia*, AD&D-game style? I pictured sand dunes, sword-slinging bedouins, camel caravans, maybe an elven sheik hanging out in an oasis.

As it happens, I was wrong about everything but the sand dunes. The DARK SUN set has little in common with Arabia, Egypt, or any other earthly locale. Using the desert as a metaphor for struggle and despair, this set presents a truly alien setting, bizarre even by AD&D game standards. From dragons to spell-casting, from character classes to gold pieces, this set ties familiar AD&D conventions into knots, resulting in one of the most fascinating and original game worlds that TSR has ever produced.

Goodies: The lavish package includes two thick campaign guides, a booklet titled *A Little Knowledge* (featuring a short story and a couple of *Monstrous Compendium* entries), a pair of colorful maps, and a set

of spiral-bound flip books featuring an introductory adventure. The campaign guides, one explaining the background of the DARK SUN world and the other detailing the new rules, are well-written, clearly organized, and liberally illustrated with evocative black-and-white artwork. The background book, called *The Wanderer's Journal*, is written in the style of a first-person memoir (page 3: "The description that follows is what, over the years, I have pieced together about the geography of our world. There are many omissions, and no doubt dozens of errors, for my information is gathered from travelers, merchants, and explorers—some of whom no doubt felt that it was in their best interest to mislead me wherever possible."). While this approach makes for interesting reading the first time through, it's annoying later on when the DM has to sift through all of the narrative clutter to dig out the facts he needs for his campaign. I'd have preferred a straight encyclopedic presentation, similar to that of the *Time of the Dragon* and SPELLJAMMER® boxed sets.

The flip books, made of cardstock pages bound by metal spirals, are the set's most unusual components. The back covers have accordion folds so that the books can stand upright on a table. The *Dungeon Master's Book* details a simple adventure, complete with encounter descriptions, game statistics, and role-playing notes. The *Player Aid Cards* contain pictures and diagrams to be shown to the players during key points of the adventure. Though the adventure is cleverly staged and reasonably engaging, it hardly merits a format this elaborate. Since players are unlikely to use the adventure more than once or twice, a couple of stapled booklets would have sufficed. The flip books would have been more useful had they contained frequently needed reference material, such as character-class summaries, spell lists, or combat tables.

Setting: Athas, the land of the DARK SUN setting, shares the post-apocalyptic desolation of FGU's AFTERMATH* game, GDW's TWILIGHT 2000* game, and other after-the-holocaust RPGs. Where those game worlds were ravaged by technology, the devastation of Athas appears to be the result of magic run amuck. Most of Athas is an empty desert, interrupted by a handful of corrupt city states controlled by power-mad sorcerer-kings and their spell-wielding lackeys. Slavery is commonplace, gladiatorial duels provide entertainment for the elite, and treachery and death permeate the culture. As rain falls only

Role-playing games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor, but may be useful
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	The Best

once per decade in some areas, water is more precious than gold. Travelers risk dehydration from the scorching heat, ambushes from brutal elven raiders, and attacks from giant tentacles lurking in the dust-filled Sea of Silt. If I were on the Athas Chamber of Commerce, I wouldn't count on a lot of tourist revenue.

Imaginative details make the sourcebook material sparkle. Owing to the scarcity of natural resources, few wizards have access to books made of paper pages and hard covers; instead, they record their spells with string patterns and complex knots. Metal is also rare, affecting both the economy and the quality of equipment. The ceramic coin, made from clay and glazed in various colors, is the primary medium of exchange, worth about a hundredth of a gold piece. Weapons typically consist of obsidian, bone, and wood, and are prone to break; whenever a weapon inflicts maximum damage, it shatters on a roll of 1 on 1d20. Only a single dragon exists in all of Athas, but it's a nasty one: a 32-HD monstrosity with supra-genius intelligence whose appearance heralds disasters of catastrophic proportions.

Characters: To give them a fighting chance at living beyond their first few birthdays, DARK SUN characters are considerably tougher than their counterparts in other AD&D settings. For starters, all characters begin at 3rd level. Ability scores range from 5 to 20, and may be raised as high as 24. PCs start the game with three times the funds stated in the "Money and Equipment" chapter of the *Player's Handbook*. In the most notable departure from AD&D game conventions, all DARK SUN campaign PCs have at least one psionic talent, as described in *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. Because psionics tend to echo the effects of magic, this rule gives everyone access to powers normally reserved for wizards and clerics. A DARK SUN world thief might be able to use Clairvoyance to scan for enemies, while his fighter companion may be able to nail an opponent by using his Project Force ability.

Though Athasian humans are similar to those in standard AD&D settings, differences in other races range from subtle to dramatic. Athasian dwarves are masses of solid muscle, standing less than 5' tall and weighing nearly 200 lbs. Each dwarf pursues a singular obsession, called a focus, that requires at least a week to complete. While performing tasks related to his focus, a dwarf earns a +1 to his saving throws and a +2 bonus to his proficiency roles. Athasian elves are hostile nomads, marked by savage dispositions and a deep distrust of outsiders. The wiry halflings seldom exceed 3½' in height and live in shaman-ruled settlements in the jungles beyond the mysterious Ringing Mountains. Three new races also flourish in Athas: muls (the exceptionally strong offspring of dwarves and humans, commonly used for slave labor), half-giants (a cross between

giants and humans who choose new alignments every morning), and thri-kreen (savage insect men, also known as mantis warriors, with venomous saliva and armorlike exoskeletons). Player-characters may be drawn from any of the races, including the three new ones.

The DARK SUN set likewise skews familiar AD&D character classes. The warrior category incorporates fighters and the rangers, but excludes paladins, who do not exist in Athas. The warrior class also includes a new archetype called the gladiator. Disciplined in a variety of combat techniques, gladiators are automatically proficient in all weapons, receive a +4 modifier to punching and wrestling attack rolls, and are allowed to specialize in multiple weapons. Thieves and bards aren't much different from the *Player's Handbook* descriptions. Priests, on the other hand, comprise three distinct categories: clerics, who derive their powers directly from the elemental planes; templars, who serve the sorcerer-kings and are dependant on them for magical energy; and druids, who are bound to the essence of a particular oasis or other geographic location. DARK SUN world wizards include defilers, whose powers come at the expense of the ecosystem; preservers, who wield magic in concert with the environment; and illusionists, specialists in illusory effects who may be either defilers or preservers.

The DARK SUN rules encourage players to follow the alignment guidelines used in other AD&D campaigns, though allowances are made for extreme circumstances. For instance, if a member of the party dies from dehydration, a surviving companion may succumb to "severe desperation" if he fails a daily Wisdom check; in such a case, the desperate companion acquires a chaotic-evil alignment as it applies to obtaining water. Despite the modifications, the alignment rules aren't particularly compatible with the tone of the DARK SUN set, where the struggle for survival takes precedence over adherence to abstract principles. This world would have been an ideal setting to jettison the concept of alignment, which has never been a crucial element in sophisticated campaigns anyway.

Magic: The DARK SUN set's ecological themes are most pronounced in its treatment of magic. No deities exist in Athas. Instead, clerics worship natural forces, represented by the elemental planes of earth, air, fire, and water. The only spheres accessible to Athasian clerics are those corresponding to the elemental planes, along with the catch-all Sphere of the Cosmos. Additionally, clerics and druids may tap into magical plants called *trees of life* once per day, to gain *heal*, *augury*, *divination*, and *magic font* spells.

Wizardly magic derives directly from the life forces inherent in the ecosystem. Defilers have no qualms about exploiting the environment, as every spell they cast

sucks the life from the surrounding area and turns it into a sterile wasteland. The Defiler Magical Destruction Table (*Rules Book*, page 60) indicates the effects of defiler magic on the immediate terrain; a 4th-level spell cast in the mountains, for example, turns vegetation to ash within a 20-yard radius. Preservers, striving to wield magic in harmony with nature, cause no damage to the environment when they cast spells. However, virtue comes with a price, as preservers advance in level at a much slower rate than the self-serving defilers.

Evaluation: The DARK SUN set's events parallel many of the crises we're facing in the real world, which gives the game a degree of resonance and substance seldom found in fantasy role-playing. When a greedy minority is free to exploit its society's resources-regardless of whether those resources are economic, technological, or magical-the result is chronic misery for everyone else and a cycle of decay that becomes increasingly difficult to reverse. Intentional or not, the DARK SUN set makes a strong case for altruism and cooperation by showing the dire consequences of unbridled self-interest. Before I go too far off the deep end, let me hasten to add that above all else, the DARK SUN set is a lot of fun, filled with an imaginative array of fantastic monsters, devious bad guys, and glittering treasures. And somewhere beneath all those sand dunes, I wouldn't be surprised if there were a dungeon or two waiting to be explored.

Still, I wish the designers had invested as much effort developing the ecological themes as they did fiddling with warriors and alignments. Maybe a future supplement will focus on the ramifications of environmental disarray. I hope so, as I'd be curious to get a look at the Athasian equivalent of an oil spill or Three Mile Island. And imagine the mutating effects of magically generated pollution on dune freaks, silk wyrms, and other Athasian monsters.

For now, the direction of a DARK WORLD campaign is up to the DM, as the rulebooks don't give much guidance. There are no adventure hooks or developed NPCs, and only a few hints as to how the city states interact. I'd suggest that DMs initially avoid the politics of the city states and steer their players into the wilderness to experience the decimated ecosystem first-hand. Admittedly, it takes a skilled DM to handle the subtleties of the setting, not to mention the psionics rules and the fine points of the new races and character classes, but it's worth the effort. The DARK SUN setting is that good.

Horror on the Orient Express

CALL OF CTHULHU* supplement
Boxed set with four campaign books (205 pages total), 32-page *Strangers on the Train* booklet, 16 pages of player hand-

outs, one 17" x 27" map sheet, four 11" x 17" cardboard cut-out train car plans, one 11" x 17" cardboard cut-out *Sedefkar Simulacrum*, one 11" x 17" cut-out *Scroll of the Head*, four passport forms, two luggage stickers, and one 11" x 15" poster

Chaosium Inc. \$40

Design: Geoff Gillan, Nick Hagger, Penelope Love, Marion Anderson, Richard Watts, Christian Lehmann, Mark Morrison, Bernard Caleo, Russell Waters, Phil Anderson, Peter F. Jeffery, L. N. Isinwy-II, Thomas Ligotti, and Lynn Willis

Editing: Mark Morrison and Lynn Willis
Illustrations and graphics: Earl Geier, Laurie Deitrick, Carol Triplett, and Gustaf Bjorksten

Cover: Lee Gibbons

Because their products are seldom less than first-rate, I've been spoiled by Chaosium. The CALL OF CTHULHU game has a particularly impressive track record, including a disproportionate number of bona fide classics such as *The Fungi from Yuggoth*, *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*, and my nominee for the best RPG adventure ever, *Masks of Nyarlathotep*.

Still, I wasn't ready for this. *Horror on the Orient Express* is a start-to-finish knockout, a dazzling and intoxicating CALL OF CTHULHU campaign with the scope and richness of an epic novel. Thanks to the strong narrative and skillful pacing, the suspense never lags and the surprises never stop coming, a remarkable achievement for an adventure spanning more than 200 pages.

Goodies: It's a credit to Chaosium that the worst thing about *Horror on the Orient Express* is the box it comes in: a flimsy single-piece affair virtually guaranteed to disintegrate. The components barely fit, and it's just about impossible to stuff them back in once you pry them out. I gave up and stored everything, including the useless box, in a pair of manilla envelopes. A product this impressive deserves quality packaging. How about a box with a lid?

The components themselves are superb, boasting elegant writing and handsome graphics. The *Campaign Book* details the history and operation of the Orient Express, the luxury passenger train of the late 19th century where much of the campaign's action takes place. Four cardboard sheets of train-car plans, large enough for scale miniatures, may be cut apart and laid out to create a train nearly 15' long. A creepy humanoid statue called the Sedefkar Simulacrum plays a vital part in the adventure; cardboard replicas of the Simulacrum's arms, torso, and other dismembered pieces are distributed to the players as they track them down during the game. The generous set of player handouts include embossed passports, newspaper clippings, and a ragged parchment called the *Scroll of the Dead* that the Keeper is advised roll up on a pencil, tie with a leather strip, then stain with coffee

to create convincing age spots.

Three books contain the bulk of the adventure, each spotlighting a number of exotic European locales. Considering the number of authors involved, the writing is surprisingly seamless. The books are well-organized and loaded with troubleshooting tips, making the complex adventure relatively easy to run. Informative side-bars offer spell descriptions, culture notes for the various cities, and optional encounters. The *Strangers on the Train* book features statistics, background information, and pictures for 28 non-player characters; each character sheet is perforated for easy removal. A pair of luggage stickers, one for the Orient Express and the other for Le Grande hotel in Constantinople, serve no function in the game but ought to raise a few eyebrows if you slap them on your backpack.

The story: The Investigators begin in London with a request from a friendly professor to find and destroy the mysterious Sedefkar Simulacrum. Obtaining the Simulacrum, warns the professor, is necessary to thwart the Brothers of the Skin, a shadowy cult whose vile proclivities are enough to make Hannibal Lecter cry for his mommy. The Investigators must board the Orient Express and race across Europe to gather the scattered pieces of the Simulacrum. Along the way, they experience a plethora of Sanity-wrenching encounters, among them an ichor-dripping rose garden, a gargantuan chess board littered with butchered corpses, and an animated kitchen oven that feeds on the flesh of the living.

The campaign features its share of bizarre dreams, Mythos minions, and other CTHULHU hallmarks, but this time around, the tone is inspired as much by EC Comics as H.P. Lovecraft. As fans of *Tales of the Crypt* will attest, that's high praise indeed. The story carries the players along on a series of cascading shocks, each more jaw-dropping than the one before. While some scenes gleefully push the boundaries of good taste—a key moment in an early episode centers on a train track made of human organs—all are vividly imagined and cleverly staged. Other gruesome sequences include a performance of *Aida* in a Milan opera house where something other than a human vocalist supplies the music, and a visit to an unearthly city where the cobblestone streets ooze milk and severed hands dangle from fruit trees. And just when it seems that the adventure has reached the limits of its mind-bending premise, the designers pull out all the stops for a truly stunning climax, combining a spectacular apparition (hinted at on the box cover) with the single most nightmarish image I've ever come across in a horror game (involving a needle, some twine, and a dozen children).

Evaluation: Obviously, *Horror on the Orient Express* is not for the faint of heart or the weak of stomach. Neither is it for players who become attached to their

characters. Chaosium says to expect a 70% Investigator casualty rate by insanity or death. I'd say that's a conservative estimate. Players should begin with a minimum of three or four spare PCs, as I guarantee they'll be gobbled up like candy corn.

Many RPG products aspire to greatness, but few actually achieve it. *Horror on the Orient Express* qualifies as a work of art. The provocative cast of characters, colorful settings, and heart-stopping encounters add up to a gaming experience that few players will soon forget. I envy anyone who's about to get started. I wish I could do it again.

Solaris VII*

BATTLETECH* and second-edition MECHWARRIOR* supplement

Boxed set with 64-page *Gamemaster's Book*, 64-page *Players Book*, 16-page statistics book, four double-sided 21 x 36 map sheets, 12 trading cards, and one 8½" x 11" sheet of cardboard punch-out counters

FASA Corporation \$25

Design: Anthony Pryor and Mike Nystul

Editing: Donna Ippolito and Sharon Turner
Mulvihill

Illustrations: Earl Geier, Denis Nelson, Karl Kochvar, Mike Nielsen, L.A. Williams, Joel Biske, and Tony Santo

Maps and counters: Karl Kochvar

Trading cards: Jeff Laubenstein

Cover: Mike Nielsen

The BATTLETECH game remains the undisputed champion of robotic tactical combat games, and rightly so. The monstrous BattleMech robots have been designed and presented in exacting detail, while the BATTLETECH universe contains enough gadgets and gizmos to keep technology junkies occupied for the next millennium. However, though this game has lavished attention on the hardware, the human element has been underplayed. If BattleMechs didn't need pilots, there wouldn't be much use for PCs at all.

Recently, FASA began an ambitious overhaul of the BATTLETECH game in an effort transform it from an elaborate set of combat rules to a genuine role-playing game. The transformation got off to a strong start with the release of the second-edition MECHWARRIOR game (enthusiastically reviewed in DRAGON® issue #183) that provided a workable set of guidelines for creating three-dimensional characters. Now FASA takes another giant step forward with *Solaris VII*, a campaign world complete with gambling dens, dueling arenas, and other intriguing settings made to order for BATTLETECH adventures.

Goodies: Credit FASA with a major improvement in the appearance of its products. It wasn't long ago it was cranking out STAR TREK: The RPG* supplements that were, to put it charitably, a little on the drab side. Since then, FASA's

graphics have developed to the point where they rank among the industry's best. Nowhere is this more evident than in the high-gloss sheen of the BATTLETECH line. *Solaris VII* is a case in point: a classy package replete with stylish art, clean layouts, and appealing colors. The impressive maps skillfully balance utility (easily distinguished terrain, large I.D. numbers) and aesthetics (icy blue hexes for the arctic wasteland of Davion, grim grays and browns for the desolate Factory arena). The attractive rulebooks, capably written and edited, are packed with text, tables, and sharp illustrations. The statistics book provides armor diagrams, heat scales, and critical-hit tables for an impressive variety of 'Mech units. Best of all are the trading cards, an obvious extra that I wouldn't be surprised to see popping up in other game sets. With color pictures of Arena 'Mechs on the front and statistic summaries on the back, the cards serve double duty as collectors' items and reference guides.

Setting: Solaris VII is a huge planet bordering the Steiner-Marik frontier, an area largely untouched by the havoc of the Succession Wars. The planet consists of two continents. The most populated of the two, Grayland, consists of shallow seas, vast forests, and the bustling Solaris City. Equatis, the second continent, is rugged and bleak, sparsely settled by a handful of hardy miners and fishers. The planet's economy centers around BattleMech contests. Gamblers from all over the galaxy line up to wager on the games and support their favorite combatants. The *Gamemaster's Book* lists the planet's Top 20 Unlimited Class MechWarriors as chosen by a poll of oddsmakers and sports writers. The list includes each warrior's tactics, background, and BattleMech preference, but no game statistics. It's up to the referee to assign statistics appropriate to the power level of his campaign. That's a lot of work; at the very least, it would've been nice if a few samples had been given.

A visitor's guide to Solaris City describes the community's public works installations (including the General Court and the Council Hall), information centers (such as the Solaris Broadcasting Corporation and the Solaris Times, the planet's highest circulation newspaper), and finer hotels (ranging from the luxurious Solaris Hilton to the seedy Golden Atlas). Additionally, each sector boasts its own dueling arena, maintained as a source of income for the local government. A chapter in the *Player's Book* covers the history and physical features of each arena, while a corresponding chapter in the *Gamemaster's Book* supplies rules and map set-ups for staging battles in them.

New rules: The *Gamemaster's Book* offers a potpourri of optional ideas to supplement the rules in the second-edition MECHWARRIOR game. Reputation Ratings help PCs round up spare parts and obtain bookings at quality arenas. Cash-poor

characters may use the Patron Table in an attempt to attract financial backing. The book also furnishes comprehensive combat rules for resolving BattleMech duels in quarter-scale; four hexes and four turns in the quarter-scale system equal one hex and one turn in the original system. Combining concepts from both BATTLETECH and MECHWARRIOR games, the quarter-scale system is not particularly easy to learn—a sprinting Mech, for instance, suffers a +2 Piloting Modifier, earns a -1 Fire Modifier to any ranged attacks made against it, and must spend a Movement Point (MP) cost equal to twice its current walking MP. Still, the system remains an interesting alternative to conventional Mech combat, and veteran players should have fun fooling around with it.

Evaluation: Though *Solaris VII* offers a good overview of the game world, it's short on specifics. There's not much about the planet's culture or ecology, and only tantalizing peeks into the inner workings of the sector governments. The books give thorough guidelines for arena duels but little in the way of campaign design. Though creative referees will find plenty of use for this material in its raw state, the rest of us will have to wait for the supplements to fill in the blanks.

Also note that *Solaris VII* is not a stand-alone product, requiring both BATTLETECH and second-edition MECHWARRIOR games for maximum enjoyment. Serious

players, however, should have no qualms about investing in all three. Taken together, these products mark a renaissance in BATTLETECH gaming. Mech pilots never had it so good.

Short and sweet

CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS* game, by Frank Chadwick. GDW, Inc., \$18. Based on the *Xenozoic Tales* comic book (published by Kitchen Sink Press), the CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS role-playing game postulates a setting in the future where an ecological disaster has reduced civilization to ruins. A handful of survivors find themselves up against an army of sabre-tooth tigers, iguanodons, and similarly hostile creatures that have mysteriously appeared from earth's past. Players take the roles of ordinary humans, defined by six basic attributes (Strength, Agility, Constitution, Charisma, Intelligence, and Education). A variety of skills, ranging from Leadership to Metallurgy, derive from the attributes. Each skill receives a rating from 1 to 10, the higher the better. To use a skill, a character's 1d10 roll must be less than or equal to the relevant rating, with penalties and bonuses applied to the roll based on the relative difficulty of the task.

So far, so good, until we reach the combat rules: a dense tangle of formulas and modifiers that's gratingly out of sync with the user-friendly approach of the rest of the game. Firing combat, for instance,

involves reloading ratings, range determination, and the effects of recoil. To determine the concussion of a demolition charge, you divide the Damage Point value by two, take the square root of the results, and multiply it by 5. *Square root?* What's a square root doing in a game with rampaging dinosaurs? It all seems to work—veteran designer Frank Chadwick is incapable of doing a shoddy job—but it's too hard by half. Fans of the comic book should get a kick out of the informative sourcebook material and Mark Schultz's exquisite illustrations. Role-players, however, may wonder if a premise this modest is worth all the effort.

Tooniversal Tour Guide, by Robert "Doc" Cross. Steve Jackson Games, \$20. This new supplement for the TOON* game brings both good news and bad. The bad news: There's a bunch of new rules for Speed Ratings, map making, and other tedious concepts typical of conventional RPGs. Rigid mechanics violate the game's free-wheeling premise, and the TOON game needs them like a hot dog needs frosting.

The good news: The rules only take up a small part of first chapter. The rest of the book features nearly 200 pages of material parodying nine familiar role-playing genres, and it's a riot. *Toonpunk 2020½*, *Mektoon*, and *Crawl of Catchoola* are among the more memorable entries, but first prize goes to *Dungeons and Toons*, which details a screwball fantasy world ruled by a powerful wizard named Teeyesarr. Character races include squirrels and mice, frisbees are used as missile weapons, and nasty undead called "The UnFallen Down" stumble through hopelessly contrived dungeons in the Forgotten Helms. It's actually possible to stage adventures in these demented settings, but that's almost beside the point—the book skewers the industry with such precision that game designers will probably think twice the next time they're tempted to trot out their favorite clichés. [Another short review of this supplement appears in "Role-playing Reviews II," by Allen Varney, in this issue.]

Amberzine, edited by Erick Wujcik. Phage Press, \$10 per issue. Role-players intrigued by Erick Wujcik's innovative AMBER* game (reviewed in DRAGON issue #182) might want to take a look at *Amberzine*, a 160-page digest-sized magazine packed with AMBER-related odds and ends. A lengthy account of a memorable AMBER campaign, a lively letters column, and a tour of the Santa Fe headquarters of novelist Roger Zelazny highlight the premiere issue. As is the case with most fan publications, the writing and graphics range from adequate to amateur, but what the magazine lacks in slickness it more than makes up for in enthusiasm. Show your support by sending \$10 for a sample copy or \$40 for a five-issue subscription to Phage Press, P.O. Box 519, Detroit MI 48231-0519.

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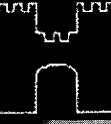
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THE MARVEL®-PHILE

Heirs to the fallen empire

Color by Steve Sullivan



With the recent detonation of the Nega-Bomb by the Shi'ar and the apparent death of the Supreme Intelligence during Operation: Galactic Storm, the once-powerful interstellar empire of the Kree has been driven to its knees. Its mighty armies and legions of Accusers are gone. Only a select few have lived through the galaxy-wide devastation. Thanks to the machinations of the Supreme Intelligence, these few are destined to become a new breed, freed from the evolutionary dead-end that had halted the Kree race's advancement for the past millennia.

Currently, the Kree Empire is under the rulership of Deathbird for her sister, Lilandra Neramani, Majestrix Shi'ar. Deathbird has collected the remaining members of the Kree Starforce as her elite guard. Originally collected by the Supreme Intelligence as his superhuman strike force against the Shi'ar Imperial Guard and the Earth-based Avengers, the Starforce was to help him regain the rulership of the Kree, a post he had held for 11,000 years before his most recent ouster.

With the Supreme Intelligence's alleged death following the destruction of 90% of the Empire's people, Deathbird was chosen to reconstruct the throneworld, Hala, and the empire under Shi'ar rule with the Starforce at her side.

Below are the statistics and gaming information for the members of the Kree Starforce. Of the six members fully detailed below, only three are known to be living still: Shatterax, Ultimus, and Korath the Pursuer. Supremor, Dr. Minerva, and Captain Atlas all have allegedly died in the aftermath of the Nega-Bomb. Statistics for Deathbird, Ronan the Accuser, and the Supreme Intelligence can be found in their respective entries in the *Gamer's Handbooks* to the MARVEL UNIVERSE™, Volumes One, Three, and Four.

Deathbird currently resides on Hala, the capital of the decimated Kree Empire, and is attempting to oversee the fragmented and crippled empire as Regent for her sister. She also acts as the Praetor of the Starforce.

Though Deathbird is often unpredictable and savage in battle, her time as Majestrix Shi'ar has tempered her passions and given her the insight needed to rule an intergalactic empire. Deathbird seems to be taking her responsibilities to heart, though her subjects are not of her own people; whether or not she will manage to pull the Kree people together as a unified empire is unknown, though she is attempting to restore order to Hala and its immediate bordering worlds.

CAPTAIN ATLAS™

F RM(30) Health: 140
A EX(20)
S IN(40) Karma: 40
E AM(50)

R GD(10) Resources: FB(2)
I GD(10)
P EX(20) Popularity: 20 (Kree Empire)

KNOWN POWERS:

Empathic link: Captain Atlas shared an empathic link with Doctor Minerva of Shift X (150) rank. This link was set up to better tie Atlas with his "fated" mate for the betterment of the Kree.

Flight: Captain Atlas could fly at Good air speed (8 areas/round).

EQUIPMENT:

Energy blaster: Captain Atlas sometimes carried a Kree military-issue energy blaster. This weapon had Amazing range (20 areas) and dealt Excellent (20) Energy damage to one target.

Uniform: The Kree military uniform worn by Atlas provided him with the following systems:

Ability enhancement: The armored suit boosts Atlas' abilities to their listed levels above; without the suit, his Agility, Strength, and Endurance were reduced by -1CS each.

Body armor: The uniform provided Atlas with Excellent (20) protection from physical, Force, and Energy attacks.

Communicator: The helmet contained a subspace radio with Monstrous range (40 areas); it could be boosted by supplemental systems for better range, but it was used primarily for communication during combat.

Self-destruct mechanism: Captain Atlas could set his armored uniform for self-destruction; after a build-up of energy that lasted five rounds, the suit could detonate in a one-area radius, causing Unearthly (100) Energy damage to all within the blast radius. Atlas apparently destroyed himself and Dr. Minerva this way, though evidence suggests that the two Kree were teleported away rather than destroyed.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Captain Atlas, like so many other Kree before him, was a career military man. His prowess in battle and his honor in upholding the codes and ideals of the Kree Empire were always utmost in his mind—that is, until he met Doctor Minerva. From his initial meeting with her, he was head-over-heels in love with her, and she became a driving force in his life, as was planned by the Supreme Intelligence.

Despite his Kree prejudices and an astonishingly rigid code of behavior, Atlas was quite honorable—the proverbial good soldier. His tactical skills are second only to his attraction to Minerva. If used in a game campaign, the word of Captain Atlas could be trusted, especially if Atlas's opponent has proven himself honorable as well.

DOCTOR MINERVA™

F EX(20) Health: 130
A EX(20)
S AM(50) Karma: 60
E IN(40)
R RM(30) Resources: FB(2)
I GD(10)
P EX(20) Popularity: 15 (Kree Empire)

KNOWN POWERS:

Through the use of the outlawed Psyche-Magnetron, Dr. Minerva altered her form and inherited powers similar to those of the original Ms. Marvel. They were as follows:

Body armor: Dr. Minerva's tough skin gave her Remarkable (30) protection against physical and Force attacks and Excellent (20) protection against Energy attacks.

Combat sense: In combat situations or when Dr. Minerva was actively searching for something, this Incredible (40) rank power was used instead of her Intuition.

Flight: She could fly at Excellent air speed (10 areas/round).

Metabolic resistance: Dr. Minerva's body had an Amazing (50) rank resistance to any diseases, poisons, and toxins.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Dr. Minerva was a scientist intent on improving the genetic stock of the blue-skinned Kree and freeing it from its evolutionary dead-end. Her monomania drove her to genetically alter herself to gain some of the powers of the first Ms. Marvel. As the leading scientist on the Starforce, she was the only member privy to the Supreme Intelligence's plan to detonate the Nega-Bomb and jumpstart the genetic makeup of the Kree.

In pursuit of a goal, Minerva was manic in intensity but was always under control. Her techniques were always methodical and systematic, and she would do nearly anything for the advancement of the Kree race, especially if it put her in a position of power.

If she is alive in your game campaign, Dr. Minerva could be hunting the player characters, hoping to use their genetic material to better the Kree race. Her initial forays against the original Captain Marvel involved her wanting him to father children of enhanced genetic potential; at the time of her apparent demise, she felt that Captain Atlas was her fated mate and they would be the progenitors of the new Kree race.

KORATH THE PURSUER™

F GD(10) Health: 100
A GD(10)
S RM(30) Karma: 40
E AM(50)
R EX(20) Resources: EX(20)
I GD(10)
P GD(10) Popularity: 10 (on Hala)

KNOWN POWERS:

Pursuer cybernetic enhancements:

Korath was the only recipient of the cybernetic implants designated for Pursuer security forces (to replace the centuries-old Accusers). His entire body has been impregnated with circuitry and power cells to grant him these powers:

– *Beta batons:* Korath's main weapons were his beta batons. Constructed of Remarkable (30) strength metals, the batons allowed him to channel energy from his body to "charge" them for the following melee combat effects: Monstrous (75) Blunt damage; Amazing (50) Energy damage; or Monstrous (75) Stun attack. If Korath did not "charge" his batons, he could still inflict Incredible (40) Blunt damage with his batons.

The batons channeled energy only and were thus useful only to Korath. The energy of the batons could temporarily overload and disrupt other cybernetic systems such as Korath's boot jets.

– *Body armor:* Korath had armor permanently grafted onto his body that provides Remarkable (30) physical, Force, and Energy protection.

– *Flight:* Korath's boots had retractable jets that gave him an Excellent (20) air speed (10 areas/round).

– *Sensor arrays:* Korath's sensors were primarily enhanced visual sensors and allowed him Amazing (50) rank Energy Detection, and they also allowed him to gauge the power types and power levels of superhuman foes.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Korath was a bitter scientist who refused to obey a mandate from the Kree leadership to abandon his Pursuer cyberwarrior projects. His determination to prove the worth of his ideas drove him to experiment on himself, changing him into the cyborg he is now.

Despite his zeal to fight for the Kree, Korath had been a scientist most of his life. He had studied fighting, but he had yet to master combat and had a slow reaction time in crisis situations.

In your game campaigns, Korath might be sent to Earth "in pursuit" of some of the Avengers for their parts in the Kree-Shi'ar war, or he might be hunting your characters for Deathbird, his new mistress, if she is an old foe of your heroes.

SHATTERAX™

F EX(20) Health: 150

A RM(30)

S AM(50) Karma: 50

E AM(50)

R GD(10) Resources: EX(20)

I EX(20)

P EX(20) Popularity: 20 (on Hala)

KNOWN POWERS:

Cybernetic body ("Technowarrior"): Shat-

terax was a blue Kree soldier who was cybernetically altered and fitted with various technologies to replace parts of his own body. As part of the Kree military, he volunteered to be the first of the new "technowarriors" fitted with artificial limbs loaded with weapons systems. His abilities included:

– *Body armor:* Shatterax's armor and artificial implants were made of Incredible (40) strength materials, and they granted the Kree warrior Remarkable (30) protection from Energy attacks and Incredible (40) protection from physical and Force attacks.

– *Capture globes:* Shatterax's armor contained two of these devices, and they could be fired from his arms with a range of four areas. Each globe would expand and harden around a given target in less than one round, becoming a globe of Remarkable (30) material strength with Good (10) Levitation capabilities (the globe floats off the ground and hovers in place) and a maximum size of 8' in diameter.

– *Computer link:* Shatterax had direct cybernetic links with an internal computer system that monitored his lifesigns and his verbal and nonverbal commands for his armaments. The computer allowed him the ability to record all visual and oral information within a range of four areas for up to 12 hours. He could also tap into external computers of Kree design with Remarkable (30) ease and Kree communications systems with Amazing (50) ability and range.

– *Energy generation ("Anti-Neutron Wave Barrage"):* This was Shatterax's most potent weapon. This Monstrous (75) rank Energy discharge took three rounds to fully activate as his cyborg body generated the energy and channeled it to the surface of his armor. In the first round, Shatterax's armor gained a Remarkable (30) Energy field that lasted until the barrage was released. This energy field afforded Shatterax no extra protection, but contact with Shatterax dealt Remarkable (30) Energy damage to the attacker. The full effect of the energy barrage was only felt when the energy was fully released. When activated, the energy was released as a wave that radiates out from Shatterax, affecting all targets within a two-area radius with Monstrous (75) Energy damage. For purposes of Slams and Stuns, the barrage is considered an Incredible (40) Force attack to all targets as well.

– *Flight:* Shatterax could fly by means of artificial legs with rockets in them, granting him Incredible (40) air speed (20 areas/round).

– *Force generation ("Charged Particle Beam"):* Shatterax's primary weapon system was his "charged particle beam" that dealt Incredible (40) Force damage to one target within a range of 11 areas.

– *Sensor arrays:* Shatterax had a wide

variety of sensors he could rely upon for analysis, detection, and recording purposes. All the following sensor systems operated with Incredible (40) rank: energy, heat, radar, radiation, sonar, and ultrasound. Shatterax also had Incredible (40) rank Life Detection. He could alter his visual sensors to adapt to up to Remarkable (30) rank darkness by adapting infrared or ultraviolet vision.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Shatterax was even more of a career soldier than Captain Atlas. He volunteered for the extensive cybernetic changes despite the personal cost simply to become a better soldier. He spoke seldom, other than to narrate his findings (in combat and exploration) to his superiors, with whom he stayed in constant contact. He rarely communicated directly with his foe but always spoke in tactical and analytical terms to detail the combat action for his commanders.

Shatterax's lack of interpersonal skills may have stemmed from his lost humanity; he was, for all intents and purposes, more machine than man and was permanently trapped in his armor. Despite the power he wielded, he was still a firm believer in the military chain of command as well as the Kree chain of authority—the military is always subordinate to the civilian Accusers.

Shatterax poses some interesting possibilities for game campaigns. While he would never come to Earth without orders to do so, what would happen to this soldier if he came to Earth on a mission but couldn't maintain contact with his superiors? Too little is known of his personality to predict the effects of having this powerful soldier on his own on Earth, but whatever happens, Shatterax will certainly cause a stir in the name of the Kree Empire.

SUPREMOR™

F EX(20) Health: 215

A EX(20)

S MN(75) Karma: 14

E UN(100)

R TY(6) Resources: N/A

I PR(4)

P PR(4) Popularity: 0

F EX(20) Health: 215

A EX(20)

S MN(75) Karma: 275

E UN(100)

R UN(100) Resources: N/A

I MN(75)

P UN(100) Popularity: 0

KNOWN POWERS:

Android body: Supremor was an android built to allow the Supreme Intelligence mobility and physical action. Up to

three of these androids could be active at any given time; the first set of statistics listed above are the default settings for the android when given autonomy by the Supreme Intelligence, and the second set are the ranks when the android was under the Supreme Intelligence's direct control. These androids were altered to have the appearance of the Supreme Intelligence; any surviving models of Supremor androids have these abilities:

– *Body armor*: Supremor was constructed of an unknown material that simulated organic tissue yet provided Incredible (40) protection from all physical, Force, and Energy attacks.

– *Communications*: Supremor had a Class 5000 transmission and reception array for communications, but standard communications to Kree outposts, etc., were limited to light-speed transmissions. However, communications between the Supremor android and the Supreme Intelligence were instantaneous, as the Supreme Intelligence operated Supremor through with a constant communication beam.

– *Elongation*: Supremor's head had a number of tentacles similar in appearance to those on the Supreme Intelligence. These tentacles, used for power absorption, could also elongate with Feeble (2) ability, and they allowed Supremor to reach any target within its area.

– *Mind transference*: Supremor was animated by the Supreme Intelligence, and up to three can be animated at once. However, only one android could be controlled directly by the Intelligence (using the second, higher set of mental stats listed above), effectively becoming the vessel for the minds of the Supreme Intelligence.

– *Power absorption*: The tentacles on the head of Supremor allowed it to simultaneously drain the memories and the Health of a victim. With a successful Fighting FEAT, Supremor could attach at least four tentacles to its victim, allowing it to drain the victim's memory. To determine how long it would take to absorb someone's memory, this Good (10) rank power drained 10 points of Reason per round until a character's Reason was temporarily at zero—if Supremor continued to drain psionic energy and memories after its victim's Reason is at zero, there was a cumulative 20% chance per round of permanent brain damage to the victim (-1CS on Reason and Intuition).

– *Repair systems*: Supremor's internal systems had an Excellent (20) rank self-repair function that operated as a Regeneration power of the same rank.

Limitation: Supremor was dependant on the animating influence of the Supreme Intelligence. Without its will within the android, Supremor was only a machine. It had rudimentary logic systems and programming that allow it to function as a

Sentry, though it relays information only to the Supreme Intelligence's cybernetic think tank. With the links at the tank severed upon the alleged death of the Supreme Intelligence, it seems unlikely that Supremor will be seen in action any time soon.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Supremor shared the same behavioral characteristics of the Supreme Intelligence, with a few subtle differences. While the Intelligence was a planner and a manipulator, Supremor acted to help the plans toward their goals. Supremor could be very arrogant and overestimate his power and control of a situation, and it was nowhere near as omniscient as it believed itself to be. Supremor tended to be very aggressive in battle, possibly due to the lack of physical activity of its motivator. As the only physical input for the Supreme Intelligence, Supremor lived to explore, investigate, and, most of all, experience the raw physical nature of life.

In your game campaign, a Supremor android could easily be animated on Earth, whether controlled by the Supreme Intelligence or not. Perhaps another powerful being's mind animates it, or it is working off pre-existing programming. The android could run amok, absorbing peoples' minds and becoming a gestalt mind independent of the Supreme Intelligence. If heroes fall victim to it, the situation could lead to involved role-playing adventures as your heroes attempt to free their comrades' minds from this ugly android form. Of course, Supremor could become a parallel of the Wonder Man/Vision conundrum, with his absorbed mind(s) adapting to a new body and new experiences. Of all the Starforce (despite his current defunct status), Supremor offers the most variety for role-playing campaigns.

ULTIMUS™

F EX(20) Health: 140
 A EX(20)
 S AM(50) Karma: 40
 E AM(50)
 R GD(10) Resources: EX (20)
 I GD(10)
 P EX(20) Popularity: 20 (on Hala)

KNOWN POWERS:

“*Demon Druid*” abilities: For his centuries-long exile on Earth, this being was colloquially known as the Demon Druid, and clashed with Thor and Excalibur. Through the use of his energy and matter manipulation powers, Demon Druid sought to create an energy matrix within a configuration akin to Stonehenge that would teleport him home, a task he accomplished with the help of Excalibur. His powers may have been more extensive, but he used them solely to gain a means of teleporting home. His “Demon

Druid” powers are listed here.

– *Energy manipulation*: Demon Druid could tap up to Unearthly (100) rank power from a variety of sources, whether mystical or scientific in origin. He could absorb, reflect, and project energy for a variety of effects including his other abilities below.

– *Matter transformation*: Demon Druid could transform people into stone obelisks akin to those at Stonehenge with Monstrous (75) ability (make a Psyche FEAT roll to resist). He could also transform energy into matter and alter its form into large towers of stone, creating up to Monstrous (75) rank materials.

“*Kree Eternal body*”: Proclaimed an Eternal of the Kree race by the Supreme Intelligence, this being became known as Ultimus and joined the Kree Starforce during the Kree/Shi'ar war. He apparently abandoned the abilities listed above, only utilizing the following powers:

– *Body armor*: Ultimus' dense body provided him with Incredible (40) protection from physical and Force attacks and Amazing (50) protection from Energy attacks.

– *Energy bolts*: Ultimus could shoot energy from his hands, projecting it as Incredible (40) rank Stun blasts that affect all targets within one area, or as Amazing (50) rank Force or Energy blasts with a range of 20 areas.

– *Flight*: Ultimus could fly at Incredible air speed (20 areas/round).

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Ultimus was an extremely obsessive individual, choosing to focus all his energies on a single goal and tenaciously pursue it to its end. Once he believed something to be true, he ignored any evidence that might shake his beliefs. If calm, Ultimus could be reasoned with and was quite rational as well as noble. Despite his reason and his nobility, he was also easily manipulated. For example, he immediately believed the Supreme Intelligence's claim that he was an Eternal of the Kree race (though this should be impossible with the Kree at an evolutionary dead-end).

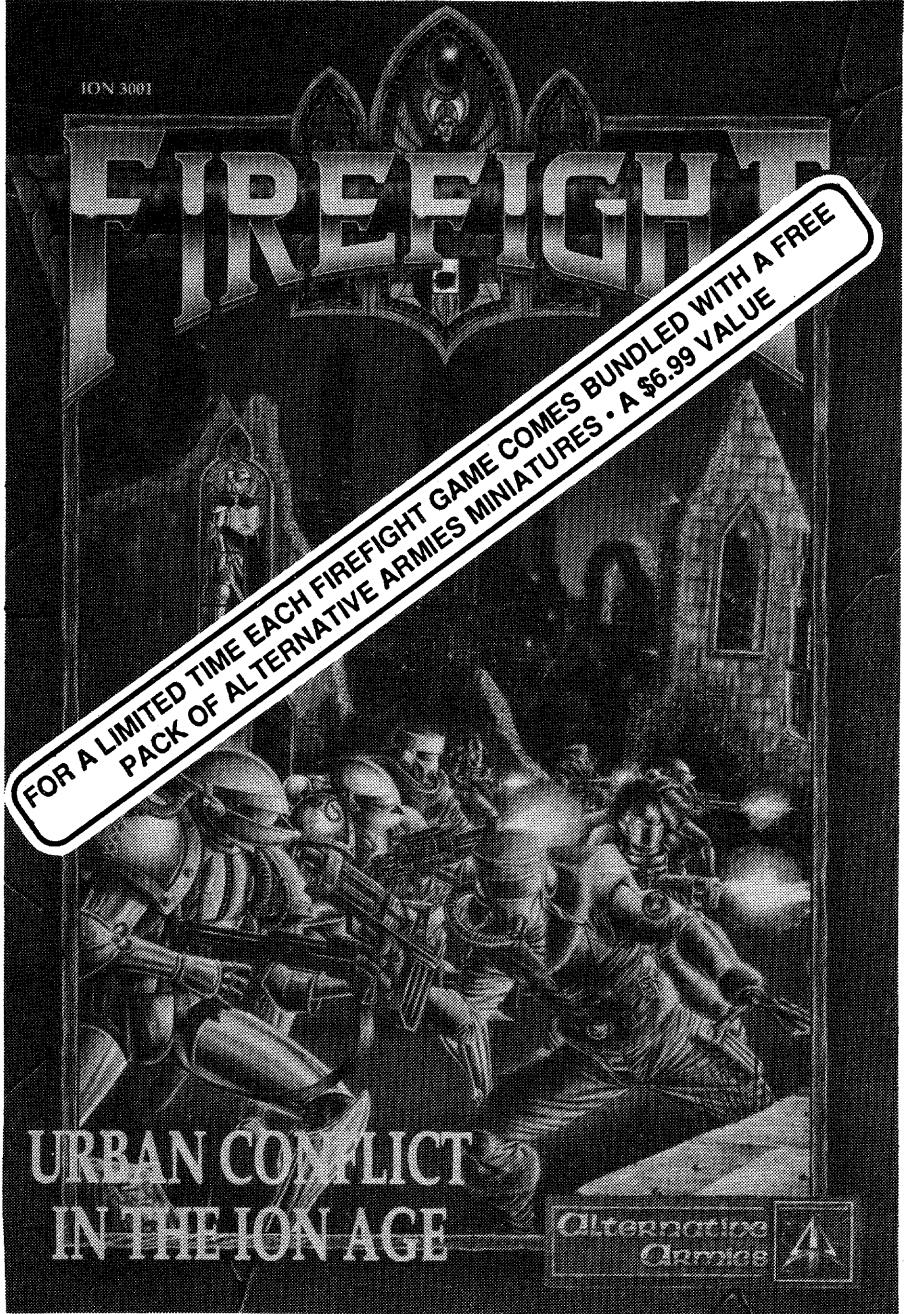
In game campaigns, Ultimus can be the foremost emissary for the Kree Empire, since he has some degree of decorum as well as the power to protect himself. Alternate game universes might see Ultimus as having been manipulated by a number of others into working for them rather than the Kree.



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by Skip Williams

SAGE advice

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (old SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage continues exploring the untold reaches of optional material for the AD&D® 2nd Edition game.

The Alertness proficiency from *The Complete Thief's Handbook* reduces the chance of being surprised by "1-in-6," but the rules in the *Player's Handbook* use a 10-sided die for initiative and surprise. Also, when do you check this proficiency?

The AD&D 2nd Edition game does use a ten-sided die for initiative and surprise. The "1-in-6" reference is an error. As I understand it, *The Complete Thief's Handbook* and other early books in the Complete Handbook series were written before the new *PHB* was released, so it was very hard for the authors and editors not to think in AD&D 1st Edition game terms while doing their work.

Alertness grants the character a +1 bonus on surprise rolls (in the current game, an adjusted roll of 1-3 on a 1d10 indicates surprise). *The Complete Thief's Handbook* leaves the DM™ on his own when it comes to deciding when to make Alertness proficiency checks. I think the most sensible method is to have the character make the check immediately before any surprise roll. Another workable method would be to allow a character to check once every turn (10 minutes) or hour. The +1 bonus for a successful proficiency check would apply to all surprise rolls made within that time.

Pages 77-78 of *The Complete Fighter's Handbook* state that only single-classed warriors can specialize in punching, wrestling, and martial arts at the same time. However, an earlier "Sage Advice" column said that warriors can specialize only once ever, changing the rule in the *Player's Handbook*, page 52. What gives?

"Sage Advice" does not change the rules. The text in the *PHB*, page 52, has been changed so that single-classed warriors can get only one weapon specialization. "Sage Advice" just passed along the errata to you, the reader. If you reread the rules on punching, wrestling, and martial arts specialization in *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*, you'll find that these "specializations" do not count as weapon specializations. Single-classed warriors are free to take as many of them as they have non-weapon proficiency slots to spend on them. Dual- or multiclassed warriors can choose one style specialization and one unarmed specialization: punching, wrestling, or martial arts, assuming they have the proficiency slots to spend on them. The terminology is confusing, but these four types of "specializations" are not weapon specializations, per se.

Page 12 of *The Complete Bard's Handbook* says bards receive lesser penalties for wearing heavy armor because they are accustomed to wearing such armor while thieves are not. I must take exception to this. To my mind, multiclassed fighter/thieves are just as "accustomed" to heavy armor as are bards. The reduced penalties should apply to both types of characters or to neither. I would say to neither, since only dexterity should mitigate the noise, stiffness, and bulk of these types of armor and the *PHB* already allows for dexterity adjustments.

As "Sage Advice" has pointed out before, the Complete Handbooks contain *optional* rules for altering your campaign's scope and focus. Don't waste time taking exception to anything you find in them—just don't use the rules you dislike. As always, you'll have to use common sense when picking and choosing rules, but you never have to use all the rules in a "Complete Handbook!" I think you can still get pretty good use out of *The Complete Bard's Handbook* even if you don't allow bards reduced penalties for wearing armor.

I think you've really opened a can of worms by suggesting that fighter/thieves might be entitled to the reduced armor penalties in the *The Complete Bard's Handbook*, even if you immediately reject the idea yourself. I suppose that it isn't much of a leap to extend this benefit to multiclassed fighter/thieves once a DM decides his campaign's play balance isn't going to

fly out the window if he allows bards the reduced penalties. Why stop at just multiclassed fighter/thieves? After all, dual-classed fighter/thieves know even more about armor and how to function when wearing it than any other kind of thief—they've had training as pure fighters. Then again, what about thief kits like the adventurer, bandit, bounty hunter, scout, and thug? Thieves with these kits—especially thugs—can expect combat and probably learn something about armor, too. There are two big reasons *The Complete Bard's Handbook* suggests reduced thieving penalties for heavy armor.

First, bards in the AD&D 2nd Edition game are true dilettantes, jacks of all trades. This generalization goes beyond what multi- and dual-classed characters do. Bards don't learn a whole lot about anything, but they learn a little bit about everything, and this makes them intrinsically more adaptable than dual- or multiclassed characters.

Second, *The Complete Bard's Handbook* is specifically designed to give bards a boost. It's for DMs who want to run all-bard campaigns or at least want to encourage more players to choose bards. Many bard advocates complain, perhaps rightly, that the core rules for bards in the AD&D 2nd Edition game produce weak, unplayable characters. Certainly, a multi-classed fighter/thief has access to more thief skills and fighter weapons than a bard has. The fighter/thief probably also has a better THAC0 as well. Many people think that a bard's few spells and special abilities hardly make up for all this. The reduced armor penalties attempt to redress this.

Can the Psychometabolic science Energy Containment be maintained? If not, doesn't this mean the wielder must not only anticipate an energy attack but also win initiative so the power is "up" when the attack arrives?

The power can't be maintained. The psionicist gets to use this power whenever he is subjected to an energy attack, as long as he hasn't already used his one power for that round. This is true even if the psionicist is ambushed, surprised, or loses initiative. However, if the psionicist initiates this power he can't use other powers that round, and if an enemy sneaks in an energy attack during a round when the psionicist has initiated another power the psionicist will be vulnerable.

If the Telepathic devotion Id Insinuation is used against a contacted mind, the victim can do nothing for 1d4 rounds. Does the victim get a saving throw? If the power works, how passive is the victim? Will he let somebody walk up and cut his throat?

A successful attack with Id Insinuation makes the victim completely helpless, but not passive, for 1d4 rounds. The victim is



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in turmoil-thrashing about, foaming at the mouth, snarling, writhing, but unable to take any conscious action. A successful attack roll is required to attack a victim of an Id Insinuation attack. There is no saving throw vs. Id Insinuation, though the DM can assign one if he wishes. Note also that a mind must be open to contact before Id Insinuation can work. If the target is a psionicist, the attacker must first establish three tangents through psionic combat (see *CPHB*, chapter two).

Although Contact is not listed as the initial cost for Id Insinuation, a psionicist attacking a nonpsionicist must first successfully use Contact against the target. So, attacking a nonpsionicist with Id Insinuation requires two rounds and enough extra PSPs to use Contact at least once and to maintain it during the round when the Id Insinuation is used. Note that none of the five attack modes (Id Insinuation, Ego Whip, Psychic Crush, Mind Thrust, and Psionic Blast) list Contact as their initial cost. Nevertheless, the psionicist must establish contact through psychic combat or the Contact power before they can be used.

Can psionicists create new sciences or devotions? If so, how?

DMs should feel free to create new psionic powers and to allow their players to do the same. However, any DM brave enough to do this is on his own.

I'd suggest studying the rules for creating new spells in the *DMG* (pages 43-44). I suggest you allow only psionicists to research new powers; characters with wild talents have insufficient knowledge even to attempt research. The psionicist needs a laboratory just as a wizard or priest does. The actual cost of developing a new power probably should range from 100 gp to 9,000 gp, just as it does for a spell, but the DM will have to set the cost. Beyond this, deciding what to accept as a new psionic power involves the same process of analysis and individual judgment that introducing a new spell does.

When working with spells, you limit power and player abuse by assigning spell levels, components, and sometimes side effects to the caster. When dealing with psionic powers, you assign PSP costs for establishment and maintenance, prerequisites, power scores, possibly limitations on the number of times the power can be used, and the possibility of catastrophic failure (those neat things that plague the character when the power check roll is a natural 20).

Generally, it's best to decide what discipline the proposed power will fall under, then compare its suggested effects with other powers in the discipline to decide whether it will be a devotion or a science-more potent powers should be classed as sciences. Likewise, the more "oomph" the power has, the worse (lower) its power score should be. Again, use other powers as a guideline. In the end,

the DM must use his own judgment; pay particular attention to the "Analyzing a Spell" section on page 43 of the *DMG*, and be prepared to do some troubleshooting.

Are the psionic powers listed in *The Complete Psionics Handbook's* "Monstrous Update" section in addition to the abilities listed in the various creatures' *Monstrous Compendium* entries, or do they replace those powers?

These are additional psionic powers that are to be added for psionic campaigns.

I have a PC psionicist in my campaign who uses Ectoplasmic Form whenever things start going wrong for him in a battle. He boasts he can just walk away from the fight. He says if he can't hit anything, then nothing can hit him! Can't some magical weapons or creatures hit him?

The DM has to decide what can hit characters in ectoplasmic form. The DM could say that all attacks can hit the character—just because ectoplasmic characters can pass through walls doesn't necessarily mean that physical attacks can't disrupt the form and inflict damage; there's a big difference between passing through a stationary object and having somebody wiggle a sword around inside your ribs. However, this is an extreme view.

The intent of this power was to be the same as the ethereality of a ghost—complete intangibility to the material world. The ectoplasmic character is immune to physical attacks by normal weapons and creatures. Enchanted weapons, ethereal creatures, or creatures who themselves are hit only by +1 or better magical weapons might be able to hit the creature if the DM so rules. I'd allow +1 weapons and creatures hit only by magical weapons to do half damage, and enchanted weapons with a +2 bonus or higher and ethereal creatures to do full damage. Energy attacks (particularly cold-based attacks), gaze weapons ("Oh, there's a medusa, I wonder what ectoplasmic stone looks like?"), and spells and psionic attacks that affect the mind still pose a danger to the ectoplasmic character. Also remember that a full round of uninterrupted preparation is necessary to use this power. The character's fellow PCs also can deal with the character when he finally assumes normal form ("Darn it! George went ectoplasmic in the middle of battle and left us again. No treasure for him this trip!"

Can a multiclassed mage/psionicist or cleric/psionicist (from the DARK SUN™ setting) spend PSPs to maintain a psionic power during a round when he casts a spell? Can a psionic power be maintained or initiated while a spell-caster is maintaining a spell that requires concentration?

A psionicist can maintain a previously initiated power no matter what else he does in a round, provided that he has the PSPs to pay the maintenance cost, and provided that the power in question can be maintained. Once a power is "switched on," maintaining that power does not require concentration and does not count as an action for the psionicist. Maintaining a power does not interfere with combat, spell-casting, initiating a new psionic power, or other activities. Of course, if the psionicist loses consciousness or dies, he cannot continue to maintain a power.

Spell-casting and initiating a new power are mutually exclusive—a character can do one or the other, not both, in a single round—except that the psionicist always can initiate a defense mode and use another psionic power or cast a spell.

Concentrating on a spell to extend its duration counts as an action. Psionic powers can be maintained while concentrating on a spell, but new powers cannot be initiated. Obviously, some maintained powers do require concentration as well as PSP expenditure. For example, the Telepathic Devotion ESP allows the user to read minds. While the rules (*CPHB*, page 14) allow the power to be maintained without effort, common sense suggests that actually reading a mind would keep the psionicist occupied. If he does something else (such as launch an attack), he still can maintain the power but reads no thoughts that round.

It might be helpful to think of psionic powers that can be maintained as long-lasting or slow-acting effects. Powers such as Mind Over Body last a long time, just as a *shield* spell does; once activated, this power works on its own, so long as PSPs are expended to keep it running. Powers such as Molecular Manipulation are slow acting, like a *heat metal* spell; once initiated this power takes time before it finally works, but it requires nothing of the user except PSP expenditure.

When a character fails a system-shock roll in a campaign that uses the "Hovering on Death's Door" optional rule (*DMG*, page 75), do his hit points fall to zero? Do they fall to -10? Or, do they fall somewhere between? What happens when a regenerating creature fails a system-shock roll? Do regenerating creatures have to make system-shock rolls? By the way, is regeneration a magical ability? Can an anti-magic shell cancel it?

System-shock failure means *death*, whatever that means in the campaign. If you use the "Deaths Door" optional rule, system shock failure places the victim at -10 hit points (or lower, at the DM's option).

Generally, only attacks that destroy all the cells in a creature's body (such as fire, acid, or disintegration) can prevent regeneration. While a regenerating creature is subject to system-shock rolls, regeneration

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will eventually rebuild the "shocked" system and restore the creature. A regenerating creature also eventually will recover from the effects of disease and poison. In all these cases, the DM should assign a hit-point value to the condition to see how long it takes the creature to regenerate back to full health and vigor.

"Natural" regeneration, such as that found in trolls, is not magical and is not subject to *dispel magic* or *anti-magic shells*. It is, however, innate and independent of the creature's form. Magical regeneration, such as from a *ring of regeneration*, is affected by *dispel magic* or *anti-magic shells*. The DM will have to decide exactly what the results are when this happens. For example, a successful *dispel magic* can shut down an item like a *ring of regeneration* for 1d4 rounds. Since the ring restores one hit point every turn (10 rounds), the DM will have to decide what effect this interruption will have on the ring-bearing creature. The simplest solution is to delay the regenerated hit point until the ring actually has operated a full, uninterrupted 10 rounds.

Couldn't an adventuring party with both a portable hole and a bag of holding escape from the RAVENLOFT® setting? According to the DMG, page 177, if the bag is placed inside the hole, a rift to the Astral plane is opened. If the hole is placed in the bag, a portal opens that sucks the items and anything inside them into another plane. A clever party should be able to arrange things so that they pass through the rift or portal when it opens. Likewise, a prismatic sphere or prismatic wall also could provide an exit from the Demiplane of Dread. All you'd have to do is cast it and negate the first six layers. The seventh layer, violet, sends you to another plane if you fail a save. What's to keep characters from voluntarily failing a save and escaping, albeit to a random location?

Involuntary or consequential plane shifts in the RAVENLOFT setting do not allow escape; they just *teleport* the subject to a random location in the RAVENLOFT world. The creature is flung into the mists, and re-enters the Demiplane of Dread when it emerges. This is similar to what happens when a *holy word* or *dismissal* spell is used on a nonresident. If a *portable hole* interacts with a *bag of holding*, both items are lost; they are sucked into the mists and disappear forever, or they are destroyed outright.

If two astral travelers from different Prime Material planes encounter a color pool (from *The Manual of the Planes*) to an alternate Prime Material plane do they perceive it as the same color? If the color pool leads to one traveler's home plane, how does each character perceive it? A

pool leading to a home plane would have the traveler's silver cord coming out of it, but what if there is no cord present? If a character arrived on the Astral plane via a rift created by a portable hole and a bag of holding, what is the chance that there is a color pool nearby?

Judging from the material on pages 62 and 63 of the *MP*, each astral color pool has a distinct color depending on where it leads. However, when a pool leads to a character's home Prime Material plane, it always looks silvery no matter what its "normal" color is. When two characters from different Prime Material planes view a pool leading to a third Prime Material plane, they both see the same color. If one traveler is from the pool's plane and the other is not, the first traveler sees a silver pool and the second traveler sees another color. This is true if there are silver cords present or not.

The DM must decide when and where color pools appear. Controlled magicks, such as *astral spells*, always bring a character onto the Astral plane via a color pool. Uncontrolled entries into the Astral plane might not put travelers next to a pool, or they might place the travelers next to a pool that is rapidly shrinking, as might be the case when a rift created by a *portable hole* and a *bag of holding* opens and closes. Such rifts are interplanar anomalies and are very unpredictable.

Please explain the dragon of Tyr -3 THAC0. Is it possible for PCs to have THAC0s in the negative numbers?

THAC0 is explained in depth in the *Player's Handbook*, pages 89-91. The dragon's THAC0 works just like any other, except that it's so low that it is virtually guaranteed to hit opponents with armor classes of -4 or worse (a roll of "1" always misses in the AD&D 2nd Edition game; see *PHB*, page 91). The dragon gets its THAC0 from its sheer size, strength, and cunning. Player characters can achieve similar "to hit" chances by virtue of level, combat bonuses, and magical weapons.

Most psionic powers have a preparation time of zero. When running a psionicist in a campaign that uses segments, wizards and priests use casting times that take segments, rounds, or turns. This means a psionicist can call upon multiple powers in a single round and destroy several PCs or monsters before anyone else can even blink. What limits are there on psionics in campaigns that use segments?

Even in the original AD&D game, the basic unit of time is the one-minute melee round, not the six-second segment. During one round, a character can take one basic action. Spell-casting times and weapon speed factors affect initiative—they do not allow for multiple actions. That is, a wiz-

ard cannot cast 10 one-segment spells, and a fighter cannot attack 10 times with a weapon that has a speed factor of one. Multiple actions or attacks are possible under a variety of different circumstances, but never just by virtue of the segment system.

If you are playing a variant game that uses segments instead of rounds, you're on your own. The easiest fix would be to assign all psionic powers a "casting time" of at least one segment and use whatever rules you've cooked up to govern spell-casting to govern psionic power use as well. Note that the AD&D 2nd Edition game dispenses with the concept of segments altogether. Even when using the most complex optional initiative rules, things like casting times equate to a simple initiative modifier, which was the real intent behind the original game's segment system in the first place.

Where can I find a list of the armor and weapons available to Viking characters from *The Vikings Campaign Sourcebook*?

The basic equipment list for Viking campaigns is in the *Player's Handbook*, pages 66-69. As page 58 of the *The Vikings Campaign Sourcebook* explains, certain items from the *PHB* list are unavailable. These are listed in the tables on pages 59 and 60, and they are marked "N/A." Some items are marked "N/A*" and can't be found in Scandinavia, but they are available elsewhere in the Vikings' world. Additional equipment not found in the *PHB* list but available in Viking campaigns is listed in the VCS, table 7, page 60.

In the SPELLJAMMER® setting, do vampires and powerful undead retain their ability to drain life energy if they enter the flow? Or are they cut off from the Negative Material plane?

Undead are notorious for retaining their level-draining abilities no matter where they go. While this ability does depend on a connection to the Negative Material plane, this link is maintained in the phlogiston and everywhere else you find undead, unless the rules governing extraplanar contact for the location in question specifically say otherwise.

Can psionicists or characters with wild talents use illithid series helms to power spelljamming ships?

Series helms create motive power from innate magical abilities, not psionics (the passing reference to psionics and illithid series helms in the *Lorebook of the Void* notwithstanding). Magic powers spelljamming helms, not psionics. Furthermore, a series helm is designed to work for creatures of only one race. An ogre magi, for example, cannot use an illithid series helm.



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Role-playing Reviews

II

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Sleazy glossy high-tech lowlife heroic punks, part 1

All tech is dangerous—even with no moving parts.
Bruce Sterling, *Islands in the Net* (1988)

For 18 months, I've wanted to discuss cyberpunk games. But they pulled my thoughts in about four different directions, and I've only just focused my hazy video view, optimized this fuzzy-logic wetware, punched into the right deck—boy, I've been thinking about this too much.

William Gibson's 1984 novel, *Neuromancer*, hit the science-fiction field like a ballistic missile with a payload of fresh air. Ever since, most people—including game designers—have thought "cyberpunk = Gibson." Dismissing the works subtle thinking in favor of stylistic flash, readers say that "cyberpunk" means dark, gritty, film-noir capers set in burned-out megalopoli and featuring cybernetic druggie hackers, with lots of neon, evil megacorps, rampant sexism, downbeat endings, and, lest we forget, mirrorshades.

Swarms of second-rate imitators dutifully retrofitted all this stuff to routine action-adventure plots, spawning a whole "sci-fiberpunk" subcategory of pulpish science-fiction books and games. The original error spread like a strange meme, an information virus, or a self-organizing high-entropy Prigoginic structure. (I have soaked up too much of this stuff.) In fiction and games, cyberpunk—so far as anyone cares today—is just another way to dress up the same old stuff.

Set aside the jargon and look at not just Gibson, but Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Pat Cadigan, Lewis Shiner, and the other seminal writers of cyberpunk (or, as they preferred to call it, "the Movement"). These futurists wrote adventures of ideas, speculations on the information revolution. Granted, they wrote plenty about fashions and drugs, too, but dark? Gritty? Not always. In Sterling's key Movement story, "Green Days in Brunei," the hero sails into the sunrise with a fortune and a princess. I could offer more examples. This Movement work, not at all the same old stuff, got lost in the sci-fiberpunk fad, especially in its role-playing games.

Still, I guess that's not such a bad thing. I live less than a mile from Sterling in Austin, Texas. "Chairman Bruce," as some called him during the Movement's heyday, discussed its ideology with me at length. For a long time I found it persuasive, and I sneered at the cyberpunk games that ignored it. The trouble was that while I sneered, these games and their supplements kept getting more and more interesting—on their own terms, not the Movement's. For a year and a half, the contradiction bugged me. Now I've decided that even if the games use cyberpunk elements as window dressing, it's great window dressing on some of the best-looking and most useful game products I've ever seen.

CYBERPUNK 2020* game
Role-playing rules ("Version 2.0.2.0")
222-page softcover book; 24-page "Screamsheets" adventure and reference guide
R. Talsorian Games Inc. \$20
Writers: Mike Pondsmith, Colin Fisk, Will Moss, Scott Ruggels, Dave Friedland, and Mike Blum
Cover: Doug Anderson
Illustrations: Justin Chin, Mike Hernandez, Chris Hockabout, Shon Howell, Sam Liu, Mike Pondsmith, and Scott Ruggels

From the talented Mike Pondsmith, who started slow with the MEKTON* game but got better fast, we have this superior update of his strong-selling 1988 release. This handsome second edition features entirely revised combat and netrunning systems, smoother character generation, updated equipment, amplified background—and no rules for magic, thereby shouldering aside FASA's SHADOWRUN* game to become the premier "pure" cyberpunk role-playing game.

Set in the year 2020, seven years after the first edition's time-frame, this "adventure game of the dark future" presents all the genre's trappings in a striking monochromatic, sans-serif style. In fact, just as in the first edition, the text begins by proposing three essential features of cyberpunk adventures:

1. Style over substance.
2. Attitude is everything.
3. Live on the edge.

I never decided whether the CYBERPUNK game's first edition itself suffered from "style over substance." For some time, I think Pondsmith's talent for graphics outstripped his design abilities, but in the last few years he has given much attention to narrative tone and storytelling values. The second edition enhances these, with improved "Lifepath" flow charts to generate a quick history for your character (the designer's best innovation) and more and better campaign material. This new version excels in substance. Style is a subtler question, one I return to later.

Mechanics: Pondsmith has always seemed to me a magpie designer, borrowing systems and approaches from many other games and sometimes giving them original twists. The CYBERPUNK game's character generation, for instance, begins with point allocation among nine statistics like Reflexes, Luck, Tech, and Cool. Then the player allots points to skills that are categorized according to the statistics. Players of Steve Jackson Games' TOON* cartoon role-playing game should feel right at home here. Similarly, task resolution calls for a roll of 1d10, plus appropriate statistic and skill numbers, to beat a fixed difficulty number: 15 for average tasks, 20 for "difficult," and so on. You may recognize this from West Ends STAR WARS* and GHOSTBUSTERS* RPGs, among others.

But Pondsmith rises above other me-too designers because his borrowings show intelligence, taste, and a striving for unity of effect. Here he aims for just under a medium level of rules complexity (medium rare?), emphasizing fluid action, individualized characters, and a high death rate. The last two would be incompatible in most RPGs, but together they suit the disposable-future grimness of cyberpunk.

What's more, the designer seems willing to abandon unworkable rules and to craft improved replacements. The "Friday Night Firefight" combat system has jettisoned its three-phase turn, about half its cumbersome tables, its defense rolls, and its abhorrence of hit points. In their place, it offers a slick and efficient system of initiative rolls and wound stages (including 10 levels of death). Armor remains a flaw, as it is in other modern games: Unarmored characters become pools of blood in 10 seconds of combat, but those in flack armor can shrug off submachine-gun volleys.

The netrunning system, in which intrepid hackers venture into the consensual illusion of computer cyberspace, has improved sharply. The system affords the referee creativity in atmosphere and "data fortress" design, and netrunners have genuine tactical options. The elegant and original virtual-reality rules encourage new frontiers of play. And non-netrunner characters can now jack into the runner's cyberdeck and hitchhike on the trip, seeing what he sees. Players need no longer sit in boredom while the referee and one player game out the netrun. It's about time!

Detritus: Still, in the new CYBERPUNK* game Pondsmith has let stand some lesser flaws. Jarringly, he retains the archaic character classes of netrunners, cops, techies, "rockerboys," et al. The first edition's many typographical errors have only increased. There is still no index.

The notion of "cyberpsychosis" has also stayed: The more technological gimmicks your body has (including contact lenses and tattoos), the crazier you get. This silly rule, which also blights the SHADOWRUN* game, arises naturally from the differing priorities of fiction and games. Characters in the stories, like real people, undoubtedly feel squeamish about chopping off their limbs and organs. But players happily interlard their role-playing characters' bodies with all the heavy hardware they can afford. Without a cyberpsychosis rule or a point-balancing system, pretty soon the whole party turns into robots.

None of these flaws looms large, except the lack of an index. But there remains the troubling issue of *cool*. "Attitude is everything," says the text (page 4). People "won't be impressed by your new H&K smartgun unless you swagger into the club looking like you know how to use it—and are just itching for an excuse." Oh lord, save me from clowns with this attitude. Save me

from netrunning rules that assume you can break into Eurobank and embezzle five million bucks, but you better pay your phone bill on time or you're in *big trouble* (page 133)! Save me from the "Just Say No" message in the "Drugs" chapter; however admirable, it hardly suits the genre. It puts the text in the curious position of advocating rebellion, but only in socially acceptable ways of living on The Edge, but living healthy. Uh-huh.

The CYBERPUNK game talks endlessly about how life on The Edge is daring and dangerous—and then, every so often, striking a wise-guy street-smart tone, it offers earnest advice like you get from your grandma (e.g.: "A job? Yeah, even in the Dark Future, you gotta pay the bills, chombatta. And you *want* a job. . . ." —page 48; "You can make a copy [of protected software] . . . but think what happens if you screw up. . . ." —page 131). Remember, boys and girls, the path of least resistance is good citizenship.

I find the CYBERPUNK game's "cool" posture inconsistent at best. But, in all candor, I don't feel really qualified to make this call; after all, I sit around my living room playing role-playing games! When I talk to Pondsmith himself, I feel like Beaver Cleaver to his Arsenio Hall. So what do I know?

Evaluation: The CYBERPUNK game's second edition surpasses its first edition on every count. With its smooth action, "pure" cyberpunk atmosphere, easily accessible setting, and medium-low complexity, this game tops my list as the field's best route to dark near-future adventure.

Night City Sourcebook

184-page softcover book; 2' x 3' color map
R. Talsorian Games Inc. \$18

Writers: Mike Pondsmith, Ed Bolme, Sam Shirley, Anders Swensen, Colin Fisk, Will Moss, John Smith, Mike Mac Donald, and Lisa Pondsmith

Cover: Doug Anderson

Illustrations: Chris Hockabout and Mike Jackson

Map: TK Scott

Art director: Matt Anacleto

Info burn. This key Movement concept describes the data overload that results from society's increasing pace and overexposure to mass media. Cyberpunks seem to live for info burn, and they'll get enough of it in the *Night City Sourcebook* to incinerate their forebrains.

Night City is the large corporate-controlled city in the Free State of Northern California that serves as the standard CYBERPUNK campaign setting. South of Monterey and just north of the William Gibson Memorial Freeway, Night City joins the upscale luxury of Westhill Gardens to the looming, inhuman skyscrapers of the Corporate Center and the grotty wastes of Old Downtown. Night City also holds a university, stadium, harbor, movie studio,

performing arts center, megalithic police stations and hospitals, and the New Harbor Mallplex micro-arcology. Just for starters, this sourcebook gives you all of these—plus the airport, ferry terminal, bus station, NCART light rail system, and descriptions of every major building on every block.

If you need to locate bus schedules (page 18), traffic regulations (page 8), the top 10 radio stations (page 12), bar drinks (page 23), concert tickets (page 24), heliports (page 28), where Corpzoners shop (page 36), Arasaka Security weaponry (page 40), turfs of every major boostergang (page 43), who staffs Holy Angels Church (page 62), remaindered first-edition CYBERPUNK games (page 72), the Chinese Consulate (page 100), floor plans of the Network News 54 building ("forty-three stories of canned heat," page 104), the best hotel in town (page 112), the cyberpsycho who heads the police Cyberpsycho Squad (page 118), layouts of local nightclubs (page 119), mirrorshades (page 133), the city's best karoke sing-along bar (page 148), a geomancer (page 156), the Libertine Lanes bowling alley (page 163), the Hacienda Casino (page 168), telephone exchange prefixes (page 182), and a couple hundred NPCs and urban encounters (passim), get this book.

We've seen elaborate city guides before, from the venerable Judges Guild/Mayfair Games *City-State of the Invincible Overlord* to Chaosium's excellent CALL OF CTHULHU* game supplement, *Arkham Unveiled*, but no one until now has treated the modern city with this depth, range, style, and attention to playability. Though inconsistent in quality and grammar, the *Night City Sourcebook* presents a convincing city, a happening place. Adventure ideas grab the referee on almost every page. Send a team of cyberpunks in search of a random NPC, give them a lead to some restaurant or mall in these pages, and they'll stumble into enough trouble to fill the longest play session.

The package looks great, too—not just the wonderful Doug Anderson cover, but the skillful art direction of Matt Anacleto. This talented young man has transformed the R. Talsorian line, which always looked good, into the slickest product gallery of any of the field's small companies. This is terrific work!

Evaluation: For anyone running a mainstream (that is, nonmagical) cyberpunk game, the *Night City Sourcebook* provides a ready-to-run campaign of unmatched accessibility, or a huge info burn of settings, characters, and ideas for your existing campaign. According to 2020 pricing, a hardcopy datatext printout would run you over 72 eurobucks. At \$18, it's the best value in the field.

Note: The *Night City Sourcebook* prompts interesting comparisons with two similar, and similarly excellent, supplements for FASA's SHADOWRUN game: the *Seattle Sourcebook* and *Spawl Sites*. The

three together make an unbeatable combination. I hope to discuss these and a long slate of more recent SHADOWRUN game supplements in an upcoming column.

HACKER*: The Computer Crime Card Game

110 coated cards; 172 die-cut cardboard markers; cardstock sheet of 53 consoles, counters, and markers—not die-cut (boo!); two "Network" ID cards; two dice and ziplock bag, boxed
Steve Jackson Games \$19.95
Design: Steve Jackson
Cover: Jeffrey K. Starling

Now, here's a *real* "cyberpunk" game!

Back in 1984, I submitted a rough and unworkable game about computer crime, variously called *Hacker* and *Megacrash*, to Steve Jackson. I modelled it closely on Jackson's masterpiece, the classic ILLUMINATI* card game of world conspiracy. I couldn't make my design work, but I felt sure he could. It frustrated me that he showed no interest in the topic. Eventually I discarded the idea.

A misguided U.S. Secret Service/Chicago Computer Crime Bureau raid on the SJG offices in March 1990 changed Jackson's mind on the subject. (The whole sordid story of that raid, part of the nationwide "Operation Sun Devil," appears in Bruce Sterling's forthcoming nonfiction book, *The Hacker Crackdown*.) Jackson kindly offered me another try at the design. Because of prior obligations I passed up the chance, so he designed his own, superior take on the idea. "Since the day of the raid, gamers have been asking us, 'When are you going to make a game about it?'" he writes in the HACKER game's introduction. "Okay. We give up. Here it is." Jackson's approach bears cosmetic similarities to mine, though I'm glad to say he indeed made the game work better than I ever did. That said, it still doesn't work well.

Course of play: After the flashy posturing of the role-playing products above, what a relief to find a game that's actually about technology. In the HACKER game, three to six players become hackers, invaders of computer systems. (In a significant and inexplicable omission, the game doesn't give the hackers unique names or special abilities.) Players take turns laying out a "network" of cards representing computer systems like NORAD, the Pentagon, Malefactors Handover Bank, Wong Numbers, and Warehouse 666. Each card has a security level and, in some cases, ICE (Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics) designed to trace intruders. Players roll dice to enter "indial" systems and thus infiltrate the net; some of the many special cards give certain players "hidden indials." Some systems are network hubs, giving greater access elsewhere, or grant special abilities.

In a turn, players can hack new systems or crash them, upgrade equipment,

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ICE

"phreak" (help others onto systems they've already found), and "nark" on each other to the authorities. Large numbers of hackers in a system trigger "housecleaning," and most players experience at least one FBI or Secret Service raid. If you get busted three times, you're out of the game.

"You win by gaining active access to 12 systems, declaring yourself a Master Hacker, and retiring while you still can. . . . The fewer times you have been busted, the better the win is. Winning with no busts qualifies you for a Silicon Valley startup." Games can last three hours or more, but the box includes rules for a short game.

As you might expect from the description, play resembles the *ILLUMINATI* game in smoothness, abstraction, and general feel. The *HACKER* game emphasizes cooperation more than its progenitor, at least early on. Of course, the narking gets ferocious near the endgame. However, the flavor here is weak and the play options more limited, for two reasons that follow.

Problems: First, the topic doesn't lend itself to a highly interactive multiplayer game. Never mind "simulation" — this game hardly mimics the actual hacking process, but that's no big deal. Rather, the activity of hacking is solitary and basically repetitive, not cumulative. Play options don't change or develop much as the game proceeds; it's a game of inches. There's little sense of building a power base, and players can't try the all-or-nothing big strike toward victory that makes the *ILLUMINATI* game so dramatic. When a *HACKER* game player pulls ahead of the pack and becomes "Net Ninja," the others can bring down the Ninja easily, leading to a draggy war of attrition.

More important, the *HACKER* game offers little world-view, unlike Jackson's most successful designs. When you play the *ILLUMINATI* or *CAR WARS** games, the rules conjure the mindset of a world conspirator or car-combat veteran. Here, all the players and most of the systems look alike, and the victory conditions ignore the prestige value of breaking into high-security systems or foiling high-power ICE. Jackson has made a fair hack at the subject (better than I ever managed myself), but he should have debugged a few more times before running it.

Evaluation: The *HACKER* game relates more closely to real-world "cyberpunks" than the role-playing products above, but its shallow design just shows how little suited the topic is to social gaming. Would-be hackers would do better buying this game's inspiration, the splendid *ILLUMINATI* game.

Short and sweet

The Arasaka Brainworm, by Thomas M. Kane (Atlas Games, \$7.95). Atlas has published several supplements for the *ARS MAGICA** fantasy RPG. Now, Atlas has published its first licensed supplement for the *CYBERPUNK* game, a featherweight 32-page scenario involving a corporate

extraction from a biotech facility on a remote Pacific atoll. The booklet hits all the bases — the hook, the journey there, maps of the facility, patrol schedules, the computer system, predictable complications, and the finish — and you've seen it all 50 times before. Sorry, was I yawning? I didn't mean to be rude.

Interface magazine (Prometheus Press Inc., 919 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda CA 94501; \$4.50 ea., \$16/four issues). R. Talsorian Games has licensed some enthusiastic gamers to produce this 56-page magazine — "The Magazine for the CYBERPUNK Enthusiast." (It's supposedly quarterly, but not yet.) Highlights in the densely packed issue at hand (#3) include a long, meaty article on artificial intelligences; a profile of the Inmate Penal Corps; and new character classes, cyberware, designer drugs, and netrunning programs. Some material here falls distinctly below the median (a cyberleg with a wet bar? armed taxicabs? an arcology in *Antarctica*?). Even the good articles could stand more pizazz, and the editorial style needs a lot more polish. Still, this fan magazine offers remarkable value for the dedicated CYBERPUNK referee.

Darktek Sourcebook, by Charles E. Gannon (GDW, \$12). I can usually take or leave equipment catalogs, but this DARK CONSPIRACY* game supplement shows a shivery imagination that conveys the game's flavor better than the rulebook did. Dark Races and ETs get organic spaceships, insectoid robotic drones, "Slaughterbots" (little robots that sit on your brain and make you kill people), bulbous pistols that fire lightning bolts, rods that turn you into a gelatinous blob, vampiric swords, antigravity disks, empathic viral assassins, and monofilament machetes. Humans get planes, consumer electronics, sawed-off shotguns, and the corporate patrol robot called the Watchdog (price: a half billion dollars). Every piece is well illustrated, and John Zeleznik's cover is super-eerie. Put an Obedience Bug (page 16) in your referee's ear and compel him to get this book.

Classic Organizations, edited by Rob Bell and Chad Brinkley (Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises, \$18). This supplement for the CHAMPIONS* super-hero RPG is a worthy companion to the essential *Classic Enemies* book. *Classic Organizations* gets high marks for creativity, or re-creativity, in its updates of five comic-book organizations established in past supplements.

Longtime players will goggle when they encounter a Mechanon robot as Sanctuary's new short-order cook, see DEMON finally refocused as the spooky cult it should have been, and find that CLOWN, the Criminal Legion of Wacky Nonconformists, has actually become sorta-kindamusing. The writers also get brownie points for valiantly trying to update Red Doom, the Soviet super group.

for the post-Cold War world — but now, a few months after publication, it's obsolete again! Oh well, its characters can still participate, along with the players and some 75 (!) other heroes and villains, in the colossal "Assault on Sanctuary" free-for-all. With 35 more scenarios and 60 characters, all freshly created or converted for the CHAMPIONS fourth-edition game rules, *Classic Organizations* provides enough material to sate the most voracious campaign.

Tooniversal Tour Guide, by Robert "Doc" Cross (Steve Jackson Games, \$19.95). SJG continues its desecration of the lovely TOON* cartoon RPG with this painfully unfunny collection of leaden game parodies: "CarToon Wars," cyberpunk, giant robots, et al. An optional rule sets the tone, advising Animators to keep characters who Fall Down out of the game for three actions, not three minutes — a rule to keep players out of the game longer so they'll have less fun! Likewise, the CALL OF CTHULHU* game parody has characters "go sane," meaning dull and boring. Does that sound funny? Try playing it. Reader Advisory: The parts of this book I read pained me so much that I would not go on, even for the princely sum this magazine pays, so the rest may be a real laugh riot. The TOON game's supplements threaten to surpass West End Games' PARANOIA* game line for speed of deterioration. Sad, sad. [An alternate review of this supplement appears in "Role-playing Reviews I," by Rick Swan.] Q

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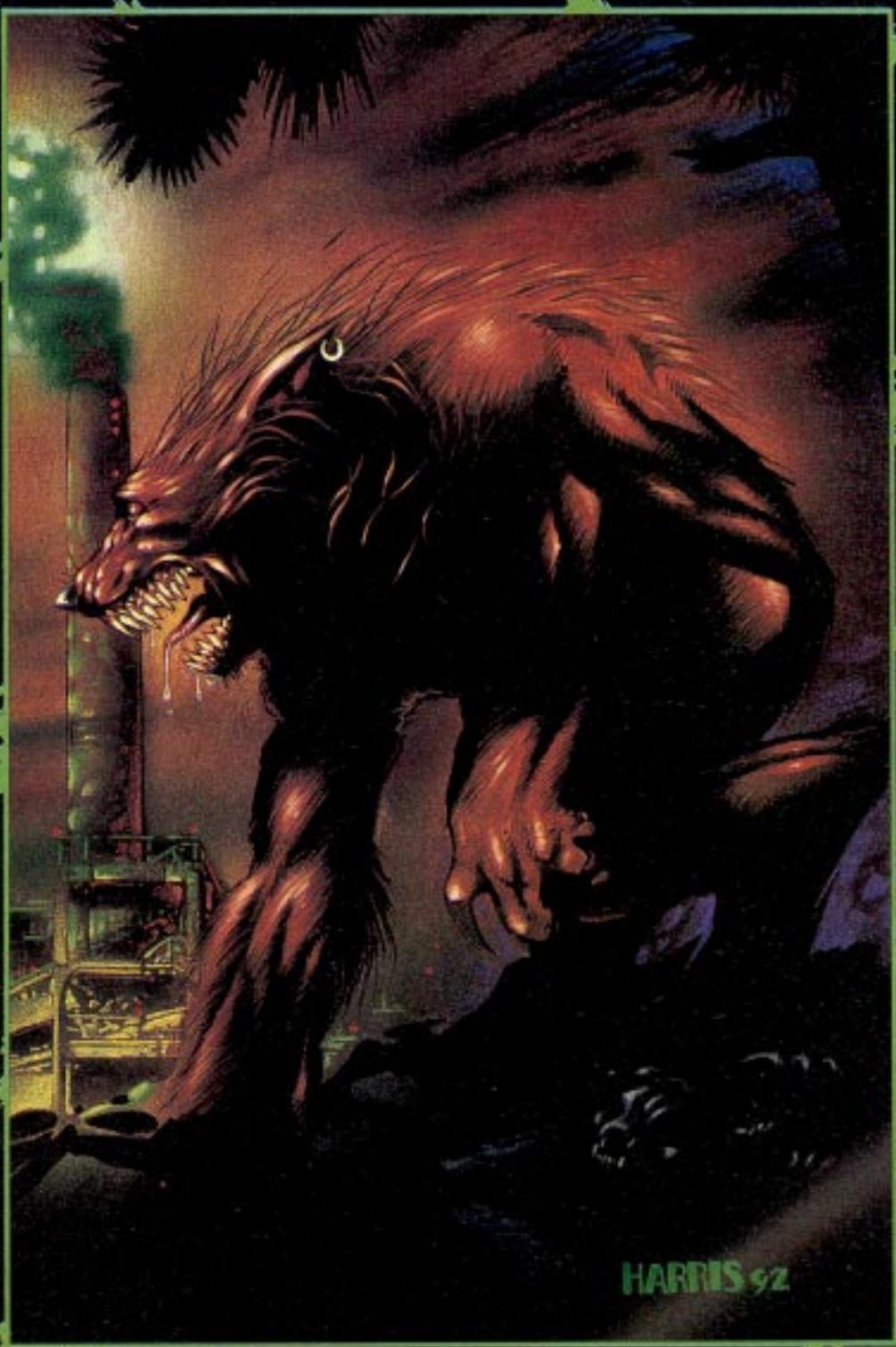


Adventure, Ho!

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by William W. Connors

Getting down to basics: TSR's new DRAGON QUEST™ adventure game



History

About three years ago, the folks here at TSR, Inc. made a really big mistake. They hired me. Like everyone who comes into a new position, I had a secret agenda. However, as Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, seemed a poor place to begin a grand scheme of global conquest, I was forced to channel my energies into the job that I had been hired for. Life can be like that.

One of the first projects that I started to work on was an introductory role-playing/board game. I was fortunate enough to be designing this in conjunction with Timothy B. Brown, a long-time friend who started at TSR the same day I did, and Jim Ward, one of the oldest of the dinosaurs who began this strange hobby of ours. The theory was simple enough: There was no easy way for new people to get into role-playing without an experienced hand to hold. There were a few games on the market at that time that might have made a claim to being easy enough for a newcomer to learn and play without help, Games Workshop's TALISMAN* and HERO QUEST* games being two pretty good examples. But these games were board games that introduced some role-playing elements. For myself, a role-player who really has no use for things like . . . whaddya call 'em . . . rules, this just wouldn't do. I cut my gaming teeth on things like Flying Buffalo's TUNNELS & TROLLS* game, which emphasized fun over game mechanics. Jim, Tim, and I spent a good deal of time getting a game into shape. All in all, it was pretty good, but in the end it just wasn't quite right for what we wanted to accomplish. So, that one got shelved and we all went on with the rest of our work.

In the time since then, Tim has broken new ground with the DARK SUN™ game world and Jim, as our lord and master, has given us countless hours of grief over things we did wrong, didn't think of, or were just too lazy to get around to doing. Myself, I linked up with a few other people around here to become one of the Dark Powers that watch over the expand-

ing RAVENLOFT™ line.

For a long time, the idea of doing an introductory game was left to linger in the dark corners of our minds. Recently however, the introductory game was raised from the dead. The subject came up when we began to design the new basic D&D® game, the one in the black box with the "in your face" dragon on it. Troy Denning included a new system for learning the D&D game in the hope that it might be easier for novices to understand. Shortly after that came out, we decided to follow up on its success with a game targeted at the mass market—the folks who play RISK* or MONOPOLY* games. It represented a great challenge, since TSR had never done a product of that type before. Further, there are those in our industry who insist that it can't be done.

In truth, there were two reasons behind the decision to reach for this market. The first reason, which made our bankers happy, was to expand our consumer base by bringing more people into the hobby. Some folks out there may think of such capitalistic intent as a vile corruption of our beloved hobby, but nobody who depends on role-playing games to pay for feeding their young ones can afford to. The second reason, and the one that I like best, is the missionary fever that burns within me. Role-playing games are magical to me. They offer people a chance to experience thrills and adventures that no other form of entertainment can. I'll never be able to properly thank the people that taught me my first role-playing game. Thus, to me, there is no greater pleasure than introducing someone new to the hobby.

Ward cracks the whip

When Jim asked (all right, ordered) me to design the new game, I couldn't have been happier. Here, at last, was a chance to work on a product that might do a great deal to improve the industry as a whole. More important, it provided me with the opportunity to explain to my parents and grandmother exactly what it is I do for a living. I arranged for TSR's David Wise to be my co-designer and editor on the project. David and I get along well, sharing a great love for baseball among other things, and I knew that we'd make a good team.

We spent a lot of time in the early days of the project thinking about what should go into a simple game that emphasized role-playing elements. We decided that the hardest thing to capture would be the sense of an unending adventure and the evolution of a character from game to game. We had frank exchanges of views from time to time, and David learned to just ignore me when I'm crabby (which is most of the time). In the end, I sat down at the old word processor with a set of goals for the game, a solid idea of the components that we wanted to include in it, and a good understanding of how everything

would fit together.

As before, however, I had a secret agenda: I wanted to create a game that would be a good introduction to role-playing games for my own kids when they got older. I know that role-playing games made it possible for me to build a good-sized base of beloved friends when I was younger, and I wanted my boys to have a stepping stone toward that same sense of camaraderie and acceptance. Thus, I had selfish motives for wanting to work on the game. I wanted the game to serve as an introduction not just to role-playing, but to the D&D game itself. Again, there were two reasons for this. The practical one is that it's the game TSR produces, and one of the ones I know best. The second one, of course, is that the D&D game is the most widely played RPG in the world. By now, anyone anywhere ought to be able to link up with a few other people and form a D&D game group. If they decided that other game systems were more to their liking after they came into the hobby, that was fine. I wanted people to know the fun of role-playing for themselves—anything else was just a bonus.

The Design

The first step in creating the game was to look at the many facets of the D&D game and decide which were needed at this level and which were not. Some of the decisions were easy: Saving throws, for example, were a complexity that could easily be replaced by simple attribute checks. Other choices were harder. How do we make a simple system that reflects the accumulation of experience points and level advancement?

One of the major concepts that role-players might expect to find in anything that calls itself a role-playing game is character generation. In the DRAGON QUEST adventure game, David and I decided to skip that for simplicity's sake. Rather, we presented a group of colorful pregenerated heroes. For those who want to use the game to bring new people into an existing group; the mechanics are so similar to the D&D game that conversion won't present any problem at all.

Gradually, we boiled down the D&D game until we had a system simple enough for anyone. We tested this by having a school teacher, a nine-year-old girl, and even our vice president of marketing read it. Without exception, they were able to offer comments that aided us in refining the rules and mechanics until they were as simple as we could make them. Still, throughout it all, we kept our major goal, that of making a role-playing game and not a board game, in sharp focus.

What's in the box?

Another important thing was the "wow factor." We all wanted people to open the box, look at all the cool stuff they got inside, and say "Wow!" The first thing that we knew we wanted to toss into the game

was a set of metal miniatures. Still, recognizing that we didn't want to put a game on the market that included anything potentially hazardous, we arranged with the good folks at Ral Partha to make us a run of lead-free figures. This made David and me very happy, so we celebrated by having a fight about which figures to include in the game.

We wanted a board, since that was what most people outside our hobby would expect. However, we wanted a board that was very useful for experienced gamers, so we opted for a very generic dungeon map that could be reconfigured and used over and over again.

Next, we wanted to make the game very easy to use, with a minimum of paperwork and record-keeping that might intimidate newcomers. We decided to do this with several decks of cards. Players of the DRAGON QUEST adventure game will find that the heroes are each presented in a format similar to TSR's AD&D™ trading cards that TSR has been putting out for two years now. Everything you need to know about a character is found on one card. Of course, every hero has cool stuff to fight monsters with. Thus, we tossed in a deck of equipment cards and spell cards. All the information that you need about your broad sword or *magic missile* spell is printed on a card. Just take the ones that belong to your hero and get ready to play.

You'll also need monsters to fight, so we dropped a few of them in too. In fact, there are nearly a hundred different monsters in the game. Each of these is, of course, presented on a card to make it easier for the DM™ to keep track of what's going on. In addition, there's a folding stand-up figure for each monster. In fact, some of the more common monsters have several stand-ups. Of course, monsters are no fun if they don't have treasure. There's a deck of treasure cards as well. These include everything from bags of gold to a wide variety of magical objects. All told, there's a ton of fun in the game. And the marketing boys keep telling me that they're looking into tossing in more stuff all the time.

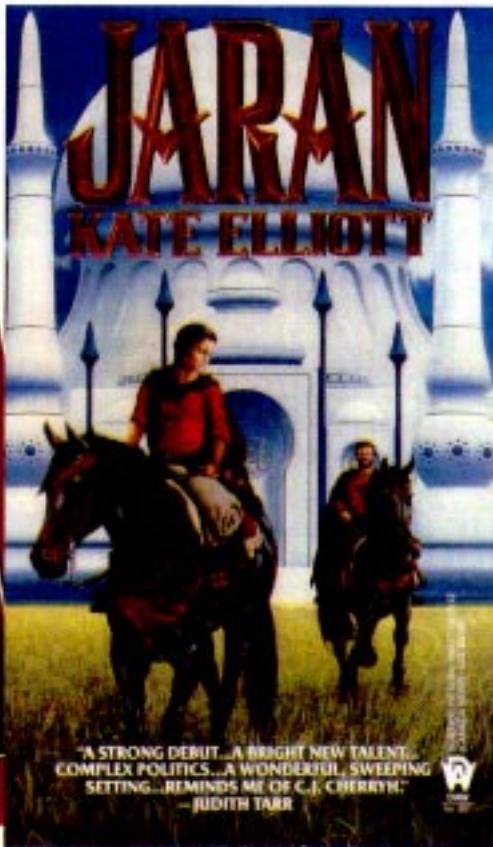
Bill & Dave's excellent adventures

David and I have been hitting a number of gaming conventions around the country this summer. Our mission was to show off the game and give people a chance to play it before it comes out. So far, we've run hundreds of people through brief scenarios and, as of this writing, not a single person has been unhappy with the demonstration. This surprised even me, because you can find someone who hates anything at a decent-sized convention. I hope to have a chance to hit many more conventions before this summer draws to a close, so I hope that anyone who can attend a convention will check to see if Dave and I are there. If we are, we promise you a good time at the TSR demo table. Ω

The ROLE of Books

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British dragons and shapeshifting cat-people



JARAN

Kate Elliott

DAW 0-88677-513-2 \$4.99

When SF writers or game designers discuss "world-building," they tend to think about geography—vast, detailed maps with forests, rivers, and mountains in all the right places, or exotic but carefully designed solar systems in which the orbits of each planet have been calculated out to the seventeenth decimal place. *Jaran* reflects world-building of a different kind; instead of designing places, Kate Elliott has created cultures and set them against each other in a deceptively intimate novel that combines interstellar politics and rugged nomadic adventure.

Tess Soerensen comes from the modern, comfortable society of a future Earth that has expanded into a substantial interstellar trading community. A graduate student in linguistics who's recovering from a badly ended romance, she's beginning a leave of absence from her studies.

But a quiet retreat becomes complex and dangerous when a series of odd events strands Tess on an obscure world in a region supposedly interdicted from outside contact to prevent interference with the nomadic Jaran, an essentially human culture that roams much of the planet. Tess quickly adapts to life with the Jaran, but the alien Chapalii are another matter—they are looking for something valuable enough that they're willing to risk violating their own laws to find it.

Tess's brother Charles, meanwhile, is immersed in the arcane realm of Chapalii diplomacy, as the only human with any political rank whatever in the alien empire of which human space is only a recently conquered part. "Arcane" is an understatement, considering that Charles won his position by leading a human bid to break free of the Chapalii, but unless he can at least begin to unravel the rules of the game, he may not hold his title for long. The fact that he seems to have mislaid his sister and sole heir isn't helping matters.

Jaran is mostly about Tess and the nomads, and Elliott does a skillful, deft job of making the Jaran both dramatic and believable, a fiercely passionate people who are masters of the sword, the horse, and the heart. It's also about the impact that just one person can have on a culture, whether that's Tess stretching Jaran tradition with her stubborn independence, Charles struggling to gain a foothold in Chapalii politics, or a minor Chapalii aide whose wavering allegiances have consequences for all three peoples. Elliott's characters are vibrant and compelling, enough so that the breadth and scope of her plot is not at all evident at first glance.

Perhaps the best news of all is that Jaran promises to be first in a series. Though the story is almost entirely self-contained, there's plenty of room left in Elliott's universe for more books and further explorations—and Elliott is talented enough that such forthcoming tales promise to be well worth the anticipation.

DRAGONS OVER ENGLAND
created by Greg Gorden and Bill Slavicsek
edited by Douglas Kaufman and Ed Stark
West End 0-87431-342-2 \$4.95

The best one-word description of *Dragons Over England* may be "confusing". I have no difficulty in reporting that I don't particularly like this collection of stories from West End Games' TORG* game universe—but it's hard to decide whether the dislike is rooted in the stories, the packaging, the game's design, or the purely subjective realm of personal taste.

Taking the packaging issue first: You won't find the names of anthology editors Douglas Kaufman and Ed Stark anywhere on the book's cover. Instead, they're buried on the copyright page, while TORG creators Greg Gorden and Bill Slavicsek get cover billing. That's not an unheard-of practice for game modules, but it's decidedly irregular in book publishing, even where game-inspired fiction is concerned. West End's promotional materials also refer to *Dragons Over England* as a novel, which it isn't. Together, the two missteps start an informed reader off with an impression of carelessness that detracts from the book's image.

Clearly, the book is aimed at readers already familiar with the TORG setting and the intricate politics and conflicts between the magical realm of Aysle and the British Isles of Earth. Those who aren't familiar with Pella Ardinay and Angar Uthorion from game sourcebooks and adventures will find much of the collection frustratingly ambiguous. Caroline Spector's "His Cool, Blue Skin" is an especially ill-chosen opening story in this regard, as the tales that follow support its characterizations inconsistently at best. (It's also the best character study in the book, another reason it shouldn't have been placed first.)

Individually, the stories are crafted well enough. Among the more satisfying are Greg Farshtey's "The Voyage of the Daria Marie" and Bill Smiths "Gypsor's Luck." The former is an appealing sea story that leaves the reader wanting more, and the latter is a clever yarn involving slave traders and an obscure divinity. By contrast, Lester Smiths "Child of Thunders" is less smooth at integrating the harshly technological Cyberpapacy into an Irish-folktale village, and Grant S. Boucher's "Tales of the Night Walker" seems like a cliché-ridden cross between two different kinds of detective fiction. The average level of craftsmanship is reasonably good though, and editors Kaufman and Stark have cho-

sen stories reflecting a wide range of tone and plot.

That very breadth, however, may be as much problem as asset. The strength of the individual tales comes at the expense of a clear, well-focused portrayal of Aysle and its relationship to the TORG game's version of Earth, and gives the book a fragmented, rather puzzled quality. *Dragons Over England* succeeds neither at reinforcing an experienced TORG campaigner's vision of the world in which he plays, nor at giving someone unfamiliar with the game a good sense of what a campaign would be like. It's tempting to wonder if the TORG game is simply a better storytelling milieu for gamers than it is for writers.

I can't recommend this book as a gaming aid of any kind—but for the most part, I can't dismiss the stories in it as bad fiction. That's a tremendously frustrating conclusion, but then, *Dragons Over England* is a frustrating book.

JUMPER

Steven Gould
Tor 0-312-85272-X \$21.95

For anyone who's ever wondered what it would be like to have super-heroic powers, *Jumper* has the answer. Steven Gould's protagonist, teenaged David Rice, bypasses the twin stereotypes of the instantly self-assured crimefighter and the mistake-prone thrillseeker in favor of a thoughtful, tentative approach that makes him more like someone's next-door neighbor than a character out of a comic book. The result is a novel that's both excellent science fiction and strikingly realistic at the same time.

David's power is the ability to teleport, or "jump," to any place he's ever been—his own bedroom, the Stanville Public Library, the top of the Empire State Building. Once he's over the initial disorientation of discovering this knack, he promptly uses it to flee the home he shares with an alcoholic father. Setting up housekeeping in New York isn't as easy as he expects, however, and he's forced to adopt questionable tactics in order to acquire identification and money.

Those problems "solved," he then turns to the task of tracking down his long-vanished mother. In the process, he acquires a long-distance girlfriend, Millie. When his mother is drawn into a terrorist hijacking and killed, his quest for revenge attracts government attention that endangers both David and Millie.

Jumper's appeal rests firmly on two elements: the teleportation power, and David's character. Gould has developed them both with skill and ingenuity. The limits of jumping are worked out with admirable logic, and the uses to which David puts his ability are uniformly clever, from a neatly executed bank raid to a frighteningly effective fear-inducing technique. David himself is utterly convincing as a teenager coping with a difficult family

life, a bizarre new power, and his newfound independence.

The first-rate characterization extends to the supporting cast as well, from the initially nervous Millie to a persistent government agent to David's parents. *Jumper* is the kind of novel whose writing is almost invisible because the story and the people in it come through so clearly, which is a tribute to Gould's ability—all the more so since this is his first novel. It's also a book gamers should appreciate, whether they're looking to inject some logic and common sense into super-hero campaigns or add a bit of science-fictional spice to an espionage setting. Mostly, though, it's a clear, unaffected story of the kind that stays with you for a long time after you finish it.

COURT OF SHADOWS

Cynthia Morgan
Ballantine 0-345-36651-4 \$12.00

Don't look for Cynthia Morgan's attractively packaged novel of Elizabethan England in the fantasy section. There's no hint of sorcery in this book, nor is it "alternate history" in the current science-fictional style, but Morgan's sweeping tale of intrigue, romance, and multiple identities does offer a thorough and thoroughly enjoyable portrait of a society not far removed from that of many a swashbuckling urban role-playing campaign.

Sometimes the research and atmosphere seem a bit too thorough, particularly in the early going. Initially, Morgan carefully offers extensive descriptions of scenery and props and peppers her dialogue liberally with period spellings and expression—the latter to the extent that her conversations sometimes sound as if they were written for the theater rather than the printed page.

But as the first few chapters go by and the plot kicks into high gear, the narrative smooths out noticeably and the characters come into their own. The starring role goes to Katherine "Kat" Langdon, who inserts herself into a secret mission her brother Nick has accepted from a servant of Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's spymaster. The two are secretly observing one Lord Harwood, who's suspected of plotting with a dissident Catholic faction to undermine Elizabeth's rule. After a series of unforeseen complications, Harwood captures Kat and penetrates her disguise, while Nick escapes only at the cost of losing his memory.

Kat and Lord Harwood spend the rest of the novel fencing with each other, sometimes with words and sometimes literally, as the pair tours France and Spain in an effort to determine the exact dimensions of the plot against Elizabeth. Their blossoming romance is tempestuous but not cloying, though it goes on at enough length that it sometimes threatens to overbalance the espionage yarn. Meanwhile, Nick has taken up with a band of vaguely Dickensian rogues and found a romance of his own, and it's not at all certain that he'll

recover his wits in time to aid Kat and Harwood when Walsingham's own lieutenant turns against them.

Morgan weaves her intrigues with striking cleverness and an emphasis on plausibility over melodrama; the story she tells is one that weaves in and out of known history rather than rewriting it. Also, her characterizations are pleasant and distinctive, also without straying too far out of the believable—while Kat does become a fencing-student in the course of the book, she doesn't acquire unreasonable expertise in the process.

What makes *Court of Shadows* particularly appealing for gamers, though, is the wide range of its focus, from Elizabeth and her court to the London social scene to country farmers to outlaws. And we see it all through a clear, nonjudgmental prose style that lets the flavor of the period come through without filtering it through a 20th-century mindset. Morgan makes her history both entertaining and informative, and while readers shouldn't substitute her work for serious nonfictional scholarship, they'll be hard put to find a book that gives a better sense of the time and place.

THE CATSWOLD PORTAL

Shirley Rousseau Murphy

Roc 0-451-45146-5 \$22.00

Take a race of shapeshifting cat-people, a witch-queen with dreams of subversion and conquest, and an orphaned girl with unsuspected powers. Add a modern-day artist, an ancient and exotically carved door, and a covert connection between a world out of myth and 1950s California, and you have veteran young-adult novelist Shirley Rousseau Murphy's first book for adults—and a story with too many ideas for its own good.

The *Catswold Portal* has at least three major plots. One revolves around the opportunistic, amoral Siddonie, who rules a sizable chunk of the Netherworld already but wants it all. That requires countering the threat of the Catswolders, an independent-minded folk whose major gift is the power to transform from cat to human and back again. A second is orphaned Sarah's quest for her identity, which takes her from a quiet life with an old wise-woman to Siddonie's court, then to the upper world that may hold answers to her questions. Still a third concerns the stalled career of artist Braden West, whose paintbrush has been paralyzed with grief since the death of his wife—until Sarah arrives, rekindling his vision at the cost of drawing him into Siddonie's secret activities in the upper world.

Any two of these would provide enough jeopardy for the average novel. The combination of all three forces Murphy to short-change her story development. We get only a very little sense of Netherworld politics, and too little time in the Netherworld to really care much about Siddonie's plans. Likewise, time that might go toward

deepening the evolving romance between Braden and Sarah is spent instead on a weird, largely superfluous subplot involving a changeling. And the revelation of Sarah's background and her place in the larger scheme of things feels rushed and superficial.

That's too bad, because when Murphy does pay attention to one of her ideas, her treatment is refreshing and crisp. Sarah's transformations from girl to cat and back are handled with grace and intelligence, the hints of Catswold presence in human history are intriguing, and a last-minute parallel drawn between Braden's art and a quality long missing from the Netherworld has definite potential. Yet none of these are more than sidelights and interludes in a tale with too many characters and a wavering focus.

The *Catswold Portal* appears to be a stand-alone novel, which may be part of the problem—Murphy is trying to fit a whole series worth of invention into a single book. She and her readers would both have been better off by treating the Catswold universe as a campaign setting, not the scene of a single adventure.

SAHARA

Clive Cussler

Simon & Schuster

0-671-68155-9 \$23.00

Recent political developments in Europe and Asia may have fans of espionage-gaming scrambling in search of new directions and new missions for agents whose opposite numbers are no longer the opposition. Clive Cussler's latest in a series of thrillers featuring adventurer Dirk Pitt is a step ahead of that game, and though it's technically not the best of Pitt's exploits, it's an apt illustration of ways to keep the secret-agent business alive in the new international order.

Properly speaking, Pitt isn't a secret agent. Rather, he's special projects director for a government agency specializing in undersea exploration and salvage. In practice, Pitt's missions often wander in and out of the world of espionage; he's tracked a missing Presidential yacht, followed a vanished blimp into a Cuban power play, and recovered a critical treaty from a supposedly sunken train. This time, Pitt and his colleagues are confronted with disaster on a global scale: An unknown biotoxin is threatening to overrun the world's oceans and kill not only all sea life, but humanity into the bargain.

Cussler's novels follow a familiar pattern that always includes a missing plane, a missing ship, and a classic car. The plane in this one belonged to a would-be Amelia Earhart, and the ship is a Civil War ironclad with an unbelievable cargo—but neither has much to do with the main storyline, though the latter is one of Cussler's more audacious historical inventions. The car, however, belongs to African dictator Zateb Kazim, one of the key figures in a hazardous-waste disposal scandal

that's the cause of the ecological plague, and proves convenient when Pitt unexpectedly needs transportation after eluding Kazim's forces.

There's plenty of action and pyrotechnics in this yarn, from a lively firefight-peppered cruise up an African river to a drawn-out battle for control of an old Foreign Legion outpost. Cussler is no amateur at keeping the suspense and danger quotients high—but his narration this time out is sometimes sloppier than it should be, with a few surprisingly awkward passages.

Still, you don't read a novel like *Sahara* for elegant style. You read it for large doses of action and cutting-edge technological gadgetry. Cussler delivers those in quantity, and this newest Dirk Pitt yarn should give readers a fair idea of the future of spy thrillers in prose and gaming alike.

FIRE IN THE MIST

Holly Lisle

Baen 0-671-72132-1 \$4.99

The challenge in writing sword-and-sorcery fiction nowadays is not to come up with something entirely new, but to make the familiar plots and conventions intriguing despite their familiarity. Holly Lisle's first novel does just that, blending the well-worn premise of a misfit student at a magical academy with a tale of rivals in spellcraft and the reappearance of a long-forgotten curse.

There are two magical academies in the city of Ariss, whose students and teachers have been forbidden to interact for as long as anyone can recall. It's not that they teach different varieties or theories of magic—it's that male and female magicians have segregated themselves from each other out of a vague mutual distrust.

Both colleges, though, send investigators when something releases a nearly cataclysmic burst of magical energy halfway across the continent. That something turns out to be Faia, who has returned from shepherding to find her village destroyed by a plague and has called down fire in a burst of uncontrolled emotion. Clearly, Faia must be trained for her own (and everyone else's) protection, though she isn't terribly pleased at the prospect. Once she arrives in Ariss, however, still another force makes itself felt—and unless Faia and barbarian-mage Medwind Song can unravel the clues in time, the two academies are likely to destroy each other, leaving a mad renegade sorceress to pick up the pieces.

Lisle's presentation of the divided spellcasters is convincing and nonjudgmental; while most of her lead characters are female, that's a matter of focus rather than propaganda. The plot moves along briskly yet doesn't rush, giving each scene and character just the right amount of attention. And she's especially successful in giving her history a plausible air of uncertainty, complete with conflicting accounts

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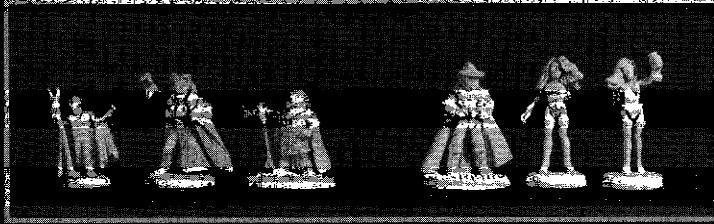
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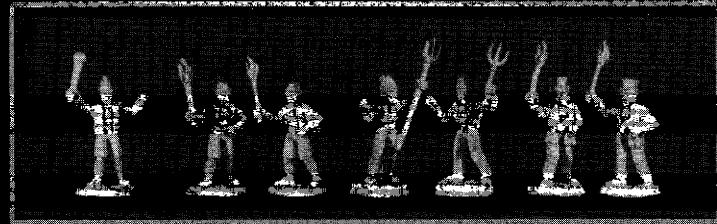
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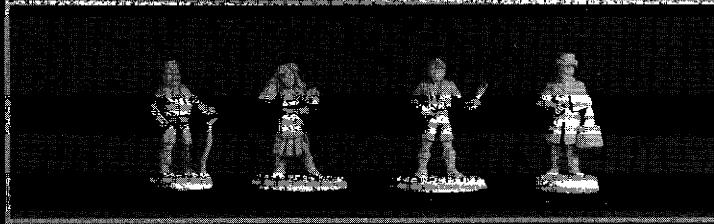
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of a key event in each academy's library.

Fire in the Mist, in short, delivers just what's needed in a sword-and-sorcery yarn: a clever combination of the familiar and the distinctive, written in a clear, accessible style that makes the book a quick and entertaining read. Holly Lisle has done her job well.

Recurring roles

After a rather quiet period, there are suddenly a couple of exceptional *Star Trek* books to report. First, L. A. Graf (a pseudonym for a three-member writing team that includes Julia Ecklar) offers *Ice Trap* (Pocket, \$4.99), a breakneck novel that jumps from crisis to crisis faster than a starship with an overloaded warp drive. It's the sixtieth numbered entry in Pocket's series about Kirk and company, and easily the most action-packed to date. The final science-fictional twist caps the book with an unexpected bonus.

Peter David's *Imzadi* (Pocket, \$20.00), takes a bit of back story from the "Next Generation" series bible and turns it into a compelling, complex book about the relationship between *Enterprise* first officer Will Riker and half-Betazoid Deanna Troi. David's previous *Star Trek* novels have shown a knack for perceptive characterization, and this one is no exception. (And yes, that's the *Guardian of Forever* on the

cover, but to say more would undermine an ingeniously convoluted plot.)

Time travel is also the subject in *Time Bomb* (Archway, \$3.75), which finds teenage scientist Tom Swift crossing paths with detective brothers Frank and Joe Hardy in a surprisingly smooth and credible adventure. The hand behind pen-name Franklin W. Dixon knows its science-fiction history; there are some in-jokes that only the very knowledgeable will catch, and there's a clever plot twist involving a message in an old SF magazine.

The Lodge of the Lynx (Ace, \$4.99) is a notable improvement on the first book in the *Adept* series by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris. A more closely plotted mystery and fewer bits of superfluous research make Adam Sinclair's second adventure noticeably more readable, though still not as self-contained as one might wish. Occult suspense fans will especially appreciate the well-rendered British Isles setting.

Super-hero genre gamers, meanwhile, should find much to like in *The Further Adventures of Batman: Volume 2* (Bantam, \$4.99), which focuses on the villainous exploits of the Penguin. The short stories range from a relatively lighthearted computer-crime caper to a remarkable, multi-mooded tale involving homeless children, stuffed animals, and decidedly

shadowy motivations. Of all the Batman anthologies to date, this is the best and most consistent.

This column's installment of the Mercedes Lackey update finds her working in two universes not her own. First there's *Castle of Deception* (Baen, \$5.99), in which Lackey and collaborator Josepha Sherman provide the first of three excursions into the world of the *Bard's Tale* computer games. There's a lot of sly humor here, but not at the cost of maintaining drama and suspense; *Ultima* novelist Lynn Abbey could take lessons from Lackey's and Sherman's example.

Switching from fantasy to science fiction, Lackey partners with Anne McCaffrey to offer *The Ship Who Searched* (Baen, \$5.99), one of a series of collaborations set in McCaffrey's world of "brainships," spacecraft operated by human minds sealed within them. It's an appealing, briskly paced story with a sentimental streak, but its wide-ranging plot shifts gears late in the book, and readers who don't catch the subtle change in tone and focus may find the ending rushed. On the flip side, the book scores points for daring to make a fundamental change in the ship-universe. Future entries in what is clearly an ongoing series will need to take the developments in this novel into account. Ω

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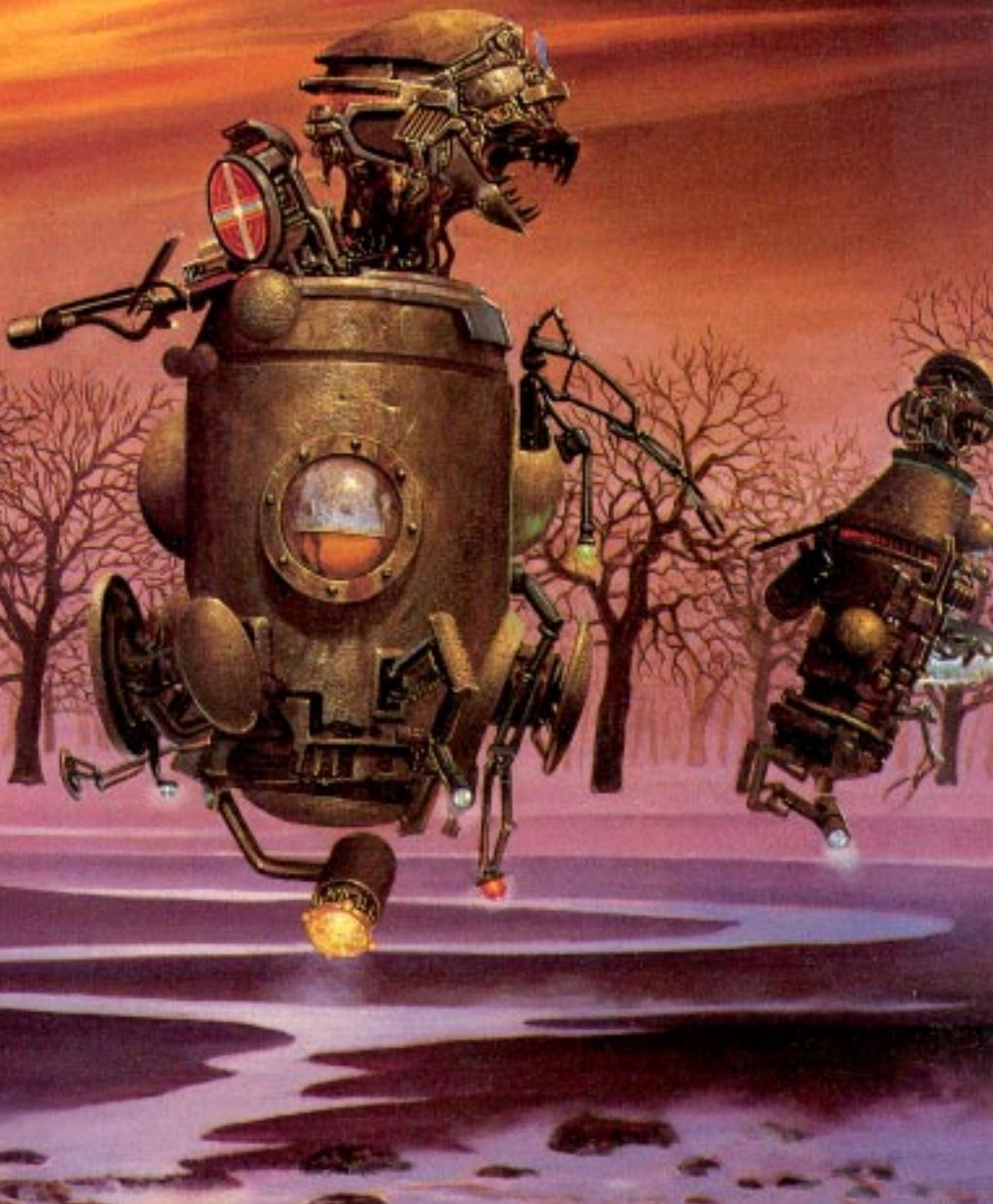
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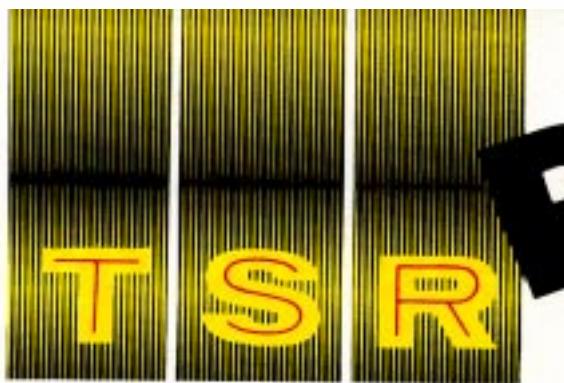
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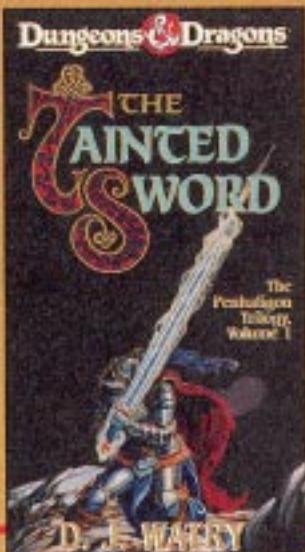
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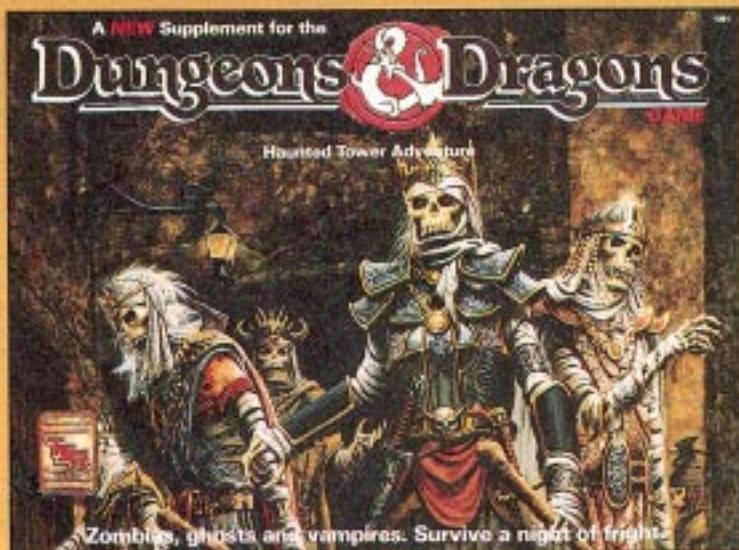
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This letter is in response to Mr. Craig Hardie's letter in DRAGON issue #166 and all the responses it has attracted. A "sense of accomplishment by designing . . . the 'perfect' fantasy world" is exactly what a DM™ gets. The task of world creation is so difficult, however, that the sense of accomplishment gained seems insignificant compared with all the work done.

I've been a DM for four years now. Many steps of world creation have always been too complex to incorporate into my design process. "If it's too complex, then make it simple," someone might say, but I don't think so. There are certain things in this world that cannot be made simpler because they are too difficult to handle. In the AD&D® game, the part about "simplicity" that annoys me the most concerns clerics. The gods are assumed to be there, yet every cleric has the same abilities and limitations, and no other thought needs to go into the matter.

The step in world design that has always been the most difficult for me to handle is the "world map" design. I've referenced the old *Wilderness Survival Guide*, DMGR1 *Campaign Sourcebook* and *Catacomb Guide*, and many atlases, yet the results I've produced always seem wrong in some way. Things go awry when I add forests, mountains, and other terrain characteristics. Who knows how another world besides ours can look? Who knows exactly what the Great DM in the sky had on his sheet of paper when he made Earth's world map?

Another aspect that gives me a run for my money involves the names used on the world. This includes the names of the people (PC races especially) and population centers. This might seem trivial to some people, but it irritates me when my players use character names like "Hawk-eyes" or "Darkmoon." I don't think today's mothers would name their children that, and I don't think a fantasy worlds mothers would, either. Naming cities and towns like "Riverport" and "Highwater" seems to take away a piece of the fantasy.

I have found a partial solution to my dilemma.

To save all the time that DMs waste by crafting every nook and cranny of their world, I suggest a "go-with-the-flow" method. Using this method, the DM does the minimum amount of work in creating his world as the PCs progress in level and begin to explore their surroundings. They start in their hometown (or are foreigners and have their own stories on how they got to the starting point), and I let them make the decisions. If they leave their home to explore the sewers of the city, I make up a map as they go along and insert creatures where I think it will benefit the adventure. If they are burglars and begin to steal from middle-class folk, I make up their victims' homes and the treasures they find as I go along. It only slows gameplay by a small amount, and it's a lot easier on the DM's part.

When I am not throwing adventures at my players, I'm a mild-mannered student with an interest in computer programming. With the help of some books on fractal graphics, I wrote a program that could solve every game master's problem of world creation. Although slow, this program runs fault lines (actually sine curves) across a map inside the computer. This map is an array of heights that depicts an imaginary world. With enough faults (the number runs close to 10,000!), the map shows a plausible game world when displayed. Unfortunately, most DMs don't have computers like the mainframes at IBM, so the results would be a bit limited. If anyone is interested in this program, I would be more than happy to hear from you.

Alex Skrabut

4 Lily St.

Floral Park NY 11001

I am writing in response to the letters in issue #174 regarding pregenerated game worlds.

Although I conduct most of my campaigns in a world I designed myself, the articles published in DRAGON Magazine and DUNGEON® Adventures for pregenerated worlds are hardly useless. Nine times out of 10, you can adapt these features for use with any campaign world. For example, take the article "Out of the Mists," from DRAGON issue #174. Even if you don't have the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting, there is nothing to keep you from having your characters encounter a psionic lich.

Likewise, if you were suddenly struck with an unanticipated assignment from work or school, and you don't have the time to design an adventure for your players, why not quickly adapt an adventure from DUNGEON Adventures to fit your world? I do this often. Not only does it save time, it also allows you to add a personal touch

to a well-designed adventure.

If you are one of those DMs who is lucky enough to have the time and ability to create your own world, terrific. You should be able to use DRAGON Magazine for all that it is worth, and for a creative person, it is worth a lot.

Matthew W. Grieco
Roswell GA

I'm writing to echo Mr. Shawn Chesak's comments in DRAGON issue #174. TSR, Inc. and DRAGON Magazine have become too preoccupied with marketing setting-specific material. While it's usually true that determined DMs can work such material into their own settings, it's never really "theirs." Such material must be molded and altered to fit, and their worlds must be altered to accommodate the material. Also, since all such material is copyrighted, the DM can never claim it's his own idea or perhaps market it himself one day. While it's also true that with enough work DMs can fit setting specific material into their worlds, the DM's innovations are always at risk from future publication of an endless stream of books, maps, etc. For all that work, it's not hard to design your own setting.

I've been DMing for 10 years, since the age of 15. Had it not been for the availability and richness of settings like the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® and FORGOTTEN REALMS® settings (along with their novels), I never would have developed a taste for the truly "world-wide" long-term campaign from which epics are born. Only because these products and those that accompanied them were available was I finally able to design my own setting and begin using it this year.

I became fired of endlessly altering and fleshing out TSR's expensive products so that they jibed with my own ideas. So, I spent about six months' time gaming every other week instead of weekly and spent the extra time drawing rough maps. I bought a 100-sheet, 14" X 17" sketch pad and mapped each part of the starting continent with a scale of 25 miles to the inch (a little smaller than the FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set maps).

I then developed a country where I thought the PCs would enjoy starting and fleshed out the towns and cities (drawing maps only for a few but "keying" the major locales such as inns, etc., in them). I developed my own ideas about PC races and altered them to fit this world's characteristics, not being fearful that my world's future would depend on TSR's future product output. I developed my own gods, cults, knightly orders, political intrigues, alliances, and monsters (or names for them specific to culture and location). None of this will be undermined by future material, and that gives the campaign a continuity my players and I like a great deal. The richness of personal detail makes the world come alive the same way TSR settings do in the novels from TSR.

Many DMs underestimate themselves. It doesn't take much artistic ability to do maps, nor do you need to quit your job to find the time to develop your game world. Almanacs and atlases are invaluable aids for developing land features, flora, distribution of resources, weather patterns, ocean currents, and vegetation. History provides vivid accounts of despots, knightly virtue, trade wars, and religious fanaticism. You don't need to finish the world in a month. Continue to use TSR's or other settings in the meanwhile, and instead of giving your unique ideas to Toril or Oerth, jot them down and develop them later for your own setting.

Over the long haul, you'll save a fortune. It

won't be necessary to buy each new product for a commercial setting, lest players wish to use it and you don't have it. Your players will never know what's truly coming up since they'll know that monsters, spells, magical items, and everything else will be unique and unpredictable. Once again, they will be dewy-eyed novices exploring a hostile and fantastic world where the next one they meet may be a wizard, or the next kobold a master assassin. Let your players help you, and good luck.

Kevin Costello
Marlton NJ

I'm writing in regard to all the letters on Craig Hardie's letter in DRAGON issue #166. I find it difficult to believe that your readers, or at least the ones who responded to Craig's letter, are so ardent in their beliefs of the superiority of completely home-brewed campaign worlds over packaged ones.

I have, in the last 10 years, played in and run campaigns in both types of settings. The truth of the matter is that strict adherence to either is bad. In gaming, as in life, moderation and compromise are the keys.

I work and attend night school, so my time is limited enough without having to spend hours on little details like where a particular mountain is, or who the ruler of a particular city-state is. (Well, these are little details to the players.) I would be happier designing encounters rather than weather patterns. At the same time, if I wanted all the details supplied for me, I would buy pre-made adventure modules and be done with it. According to some of your letters, this would seem to be a vicious catch-22. Poppycock, I say!

The FORGOTTEN REALMS setting (where my campaign now rests) is a huge area. The large maps tend to be at a 90 mile/inch scale, and a good amount of that map is blank! Does this mean that the land is flat and empty as far as the eye can see? I should think not! It only means there are no features large enough to appear at that scale. But there can be a lot crammed into that space.

Take, for example, the area where my campaign begins, in a single 90-mile hex on the southwest side of the Sea of Fallen Stars. On that hex is a mere handful of features: a couple of towns, rivers, and a lake—pretty barren stuff! Zoom in a little closer, though, and look at the campaign map I have drawn (at the scale of 10 miles/inch). The countryside is rolling with a few mountains toward the map edge. A half-dozen small villages dot the countryside. A small island chain lies off the coast. Two small forests hide nasty secrets. There are monsters in the mountains, pirates' treasure on the island, and evil deeds afoot in the larger villages. Suddenly, that one blank hex is a busy place, and none of it is in the books!

The point is that prepackaged campaign worlds are not meant to replace DM creativity. Rather, they focus it and give it direction. My players need never meet Elminster to know of him and how he affects the game world, just like we need never meet Queen Elizabeth I to know how she affected history. The details given in the campaign sourcebooks are just that—details. They supply the bones, and you supply the meat. Otherwise, your players are just left hungry.

Jeff House
Edmonton AB

In my five years of DMing, I've been constantly working on my own world. I started in at the deep end by creating my own world as soon as I

could, and in over five years it has developed from a Basic D&D® game world to a world compatible with the AD&D 2nd Edition game.

The creation is ongoing, but I feel confident when using my world. I would feel the same way about Toril if I had just spent five years researching Elminster's notes.

Shawn A. Chesak points out in DRAGON issue #174 that pregenerated worlds can be a DM's godsend, and I agree. As most of my time is spent furthering my world, pregenerated worlds with little information and great potential, such as the RAVENLOFT campaign, offer me a place to send the PCs when some important renovations are needed on their home world. Settings with the complexity of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, however, are not to be left behind, as they offer the ideal adventure setting for the DM whose every conscious minute is not spent creating original worlds.

My world is in great danger, because mad gods are loose. The smart PCs have voted to go on a quest for a safe portal that will lead to Toril. To prepare for this change, I dug out the old FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set and purchased new game material. I'm engulfed in confusing information, but without pregenerated worlds there would be very few games, variations of adventures, and DMs.

Ready-made worlds are great and are essential for every game library for reference or research, but long live my world of Gandaladia.

Barry White
Banbury, Oxon, U.K.

Recently, there has been much debate in "Forum" concerning the use of official game worlds as opposed to having DMs design worlds themselves. I am the DM of a DRAGONLANCE® campaign. After reading the original DRAGONLANCE novels, I pursued the role-playing hobby for the first time.

However, after reading "Forum," I have found that there are several advantages to using Krynn other than just liking it. The players are familiar with the world to a degree, having read the novels, so they know the various countries, races, and histories of Krynn. They start play knowing the essential facts without me having to explain them.

Official worlds do not offer much boring work for the DM to do, so he can concentrate on writing a decent campaign. I can see the appeal of creating your own world because your creativity can be let loose. In defense of that creative freedom, I would say that the official worlds are far from complete. You can add as many of your own ideas as you like. All you have to begin with is a shell that contains the core facts of the world that are a base for the campaign and the player's character.

To sum up, I use Krynn because I like it and am familiar with it, and it leaves me time to write better adventures. I also can easily improvise in unexpected situations because of that familiarity, and that improves the role-playing and the campaign.

Lawrence Hurley
Hoarwithy, Herefordshire, U.K.

I've stumbled upon the debate about Craig Hardie's letter regarding original vs. pregenerated game materials. I have GMed, for the past five years, everything from the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game to Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU® system to the AD&D game. I have played very little, mostly because none of my friends wants to undertake GMing; everyone in my group finds it too difficult to manage or

doesn't want to role-play dozens of NPCs. This suits me fine, as I find GMing to be the best part of the game. I get to play all sorts of characters and devise the adventures—the ultimate expression of creativity.

I both agree and disagree with Mr. Hardie. There is little support for the independent-minded GM, but it is not too difficult to utilize material printed for a specific game world. Additionally, I think that DRAGON Magazine could produce more world-neutral articles helpful to the GM.

I agree with Mr. Hardie that there is far too much material published for campaign worlds. I'd like to see more articles on creating and running original campaigns, not just information on the AD&D game. I have found information for other games and game worlds highly useful in the creation of my adventures and campaigns. Articles like "The Ecology of," "Bazaar of the Bizarre," and "The Dragon's Bestiary" are helpful but do not go far enough.

I for one would like to find out how TSR determines the level of difficulty for a module (e.g., saying a module is for four to six characters of levels 3-6). In addition, I would like to see generic political/economic information, generic castles and dungeons, and campaign creation. Advice to DMs is always helpful and needed—I am always sure to buy an issue when it has these types of articles.

I am the type of GM who likes to create my own world, no matter what game is being played. Frankly, I feel as though I were cheating if I use a pregenerated world or adventure; I cheat myself and I cheat my players. A GM who just reads and uses these materials verbatim is little more than a referee, providing the information and applying the rules. I agree with Shawn Chesak that the GM often forgets something from a pregenerated source, usually something very important (especially when it comes from a TSR product, which is chock full of information—so much so that the GM feels overwhelmed).

However, I do not agree that it is impossible to use information contained in DRAGON Magazine or in supplements or modules. For example, I used the information on Skullport in issue #172 for my own campaign by just removing those aspects with which I did not agree. Gone were the references to Undermountain, Waterdeep, or other features of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting. I put Skullport on the edge of the Drow Kingdom; beneath the Barrier Peaks of Oerth. The PCs in the group spent three sessions encountering (and avoiding) the denizens of "my" Skullport. My drow information came from Ed Greenwood's FOR2 *Drow of the Underdark* supplement. I use the maps for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK setting, but the history and societies are my own.

It is true that not all GMs have the time to create their own worlds, and in these instances the pregenerated information is very useful. Many are the times I have used pregenerated materials when I was in a bind. But I do not use them verbatim; I take an interesting encounter from one source, an unusual NPC from another source, etc., mix them all together, and come up with something unique. For example, I used Ed Greenwood's "Elminster's Back Door" module (from DUNGEON Adventures issue #30) as the base for an assault on a drow noble's tower. In that module, Elminster devised a series of ingenious traps to stop intruders (using stuff a lot more interesting than falling 10-ton blocks). I constructed a tower fortress whose lower levels were designed using the same design principles as the module. The module sparked my

imagination to create a unique adventure.

I have found that Chaosium, Inc. publishes supplements from which it is easy to "steal." The information provided is not campaign specific. It's as though the supplements were modular, designed so that the parts could easily be separated and put back together. Take a map from here, add a cultist from there, put the whole adventure in a different locale, place a new tome for treasure, and bang! You've got a unique adventure specific to your own campaign world. I think this is the type of product TSR should be making to support both the GM who creates his own game world and the GM who likes using pregenerated game materials.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate: While it is not impossible to adapt TSR-game-specific information, TSR should produce more generic information in support of GMs who create their own worlds. Some good examples of this type of product are DMGR1 *The Campaign Sourcebook and Catacomb Guide* and DMGR2 *The Castle Guide*. Modules and supplements should be world-neutral, allowing them to be dropped into any campaign world with a minimum of work. DRAGON Magazine is much more useful to me when it publishes articles for the creative game player, and less useful when it relies on world-specific information.

Ross A. Isaacs
Washington, D.C.

If you can stand another letter on pregenerated campaign worlds, I'd like to cast my vote against them. Most of the campaigns I've played in have been original, and I've turned down offers to play in RAVENLOFT and DARK SUN™ campaigns. I prefer to run my own campaign.

One point that I haven't seen mentioned is that in a pregenerated setting, players have access to much of the DM's source material. When I played a mage in a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, the first thing I did was read *Hall of Heroes* and *The Magister* from cover to cover, particularly the information on other mages and priests. Did I use the knowledge gained therein? Yes, shamelessly. There's nothing like being able to predict what another character will do, especially when you're in combat with that character. I justified it by claiming that my character's teacher would have told me of the major spell-casters in the world; thanks to a glib tongue and a liberal DM, I got away with it.

Worse can happen if a player knows something he shouldn't, but a DM can't prove it. Trust, friendship, and ethics aside, players are devious. We can and will use anything we must to keep our characters alive. Whether it's a module or a campaign world, a pregenerated setting allows a player to avoid tough situations simply by saying, "I've got a bad feeling about that door [behind which 100 orcs with swords +3 are waiting]. Let's take this passage instead [wherein three kobolds armed with toothpicks guard a staff of the magi]."

Another reason I dislike pregenerated settings is TSR's apparent willingness to exalt one world at the expense of another. Since Toril became the planet of choice among AD&D game players, have there been half as many products for or articles on Oerth? The 1st Edition *Oriental Adventures* material is set in Kara-Tur (within the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting), but material for that unique campaign has already disappeared. What will happen if either the

RAVENLOFT or DARK SUN worlds becomes more popular than Elminster and company? Will a deluge of material for the new favorite son descend upon us, while the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign joins the WORLD OF GREYHAWK setting on the shelf (in effect, forgotten)?

TSR is, when you come down to it, a business. I don't begrudge the company the right to make money. However, it's almost as easy, and much less expensive, for me to create my own adventures and campaign using the various rulebooks. Using my own world also allows me to develop it independently of events in TSR's settings; I can mix AD&D 1st and 2nd Edition material without worrying about how it will fit with the Avatar series or the Cataclysm. I've been playing the AD&D game for 10 years; at this point, I'd rather spend energy and imagination in revising Solnis (my world) than spend money in buying products for a game setting that might fall out of favor next year. On my salary, energy and imagination are more readily accessible than money. While the finished product might not be as well done as a TSR product, the final value of a game is decided by how enjoyable it is. I haven't heard my players complaining.

Jim Gonzalez
Valley Stream NY
Ω

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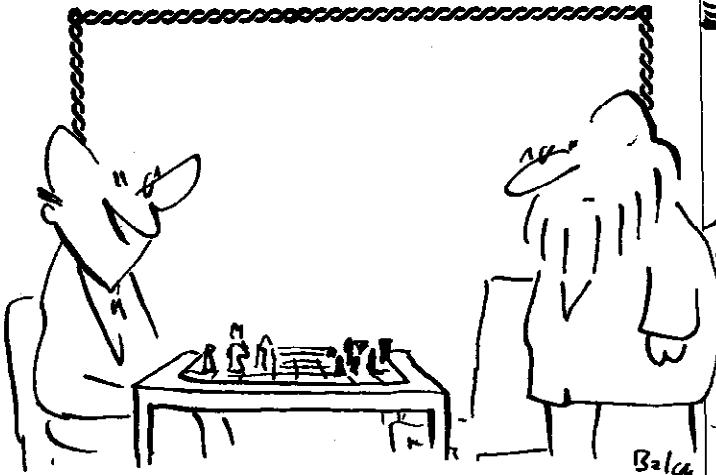
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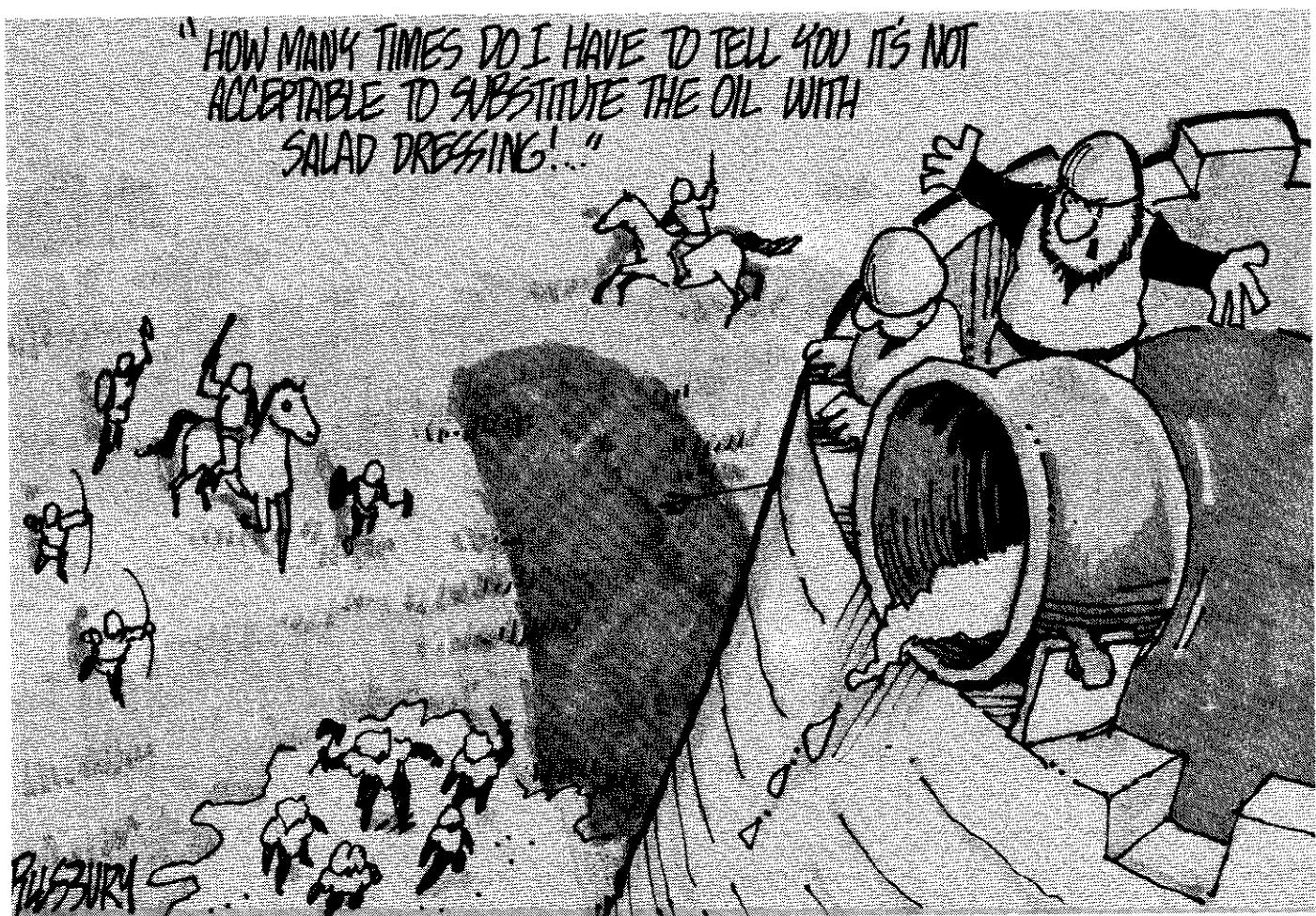


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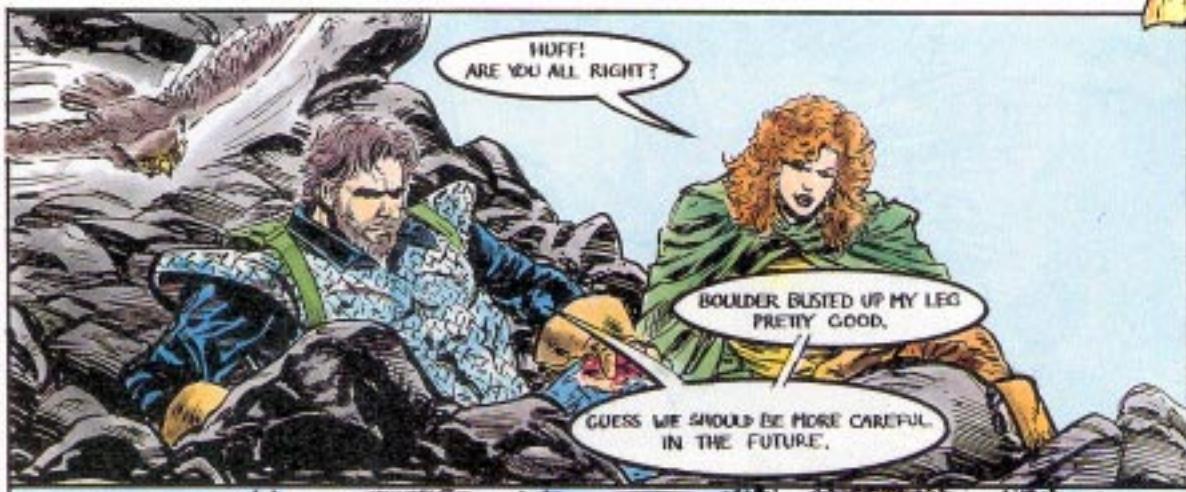
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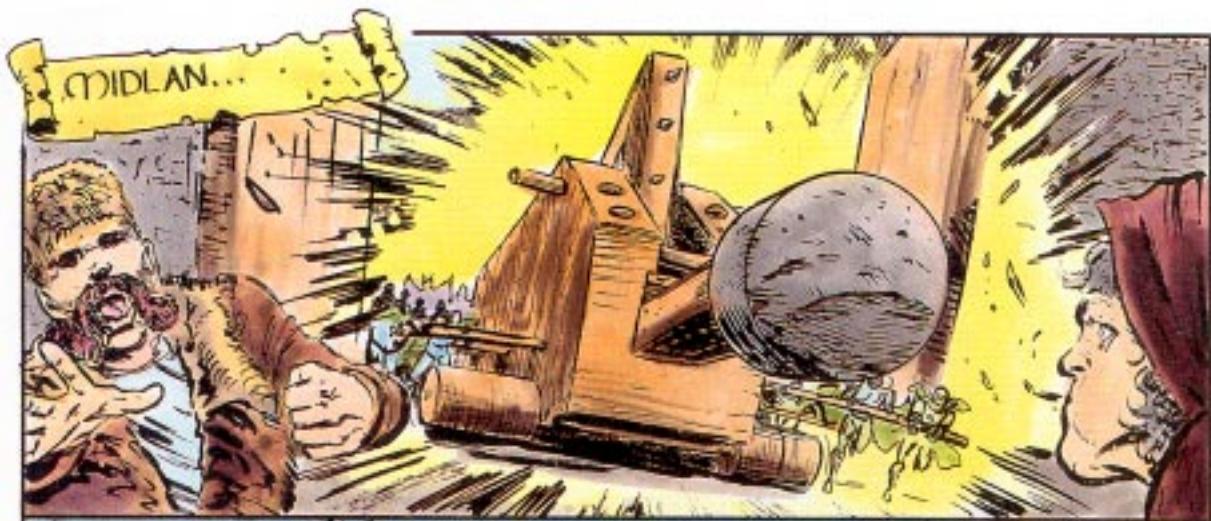
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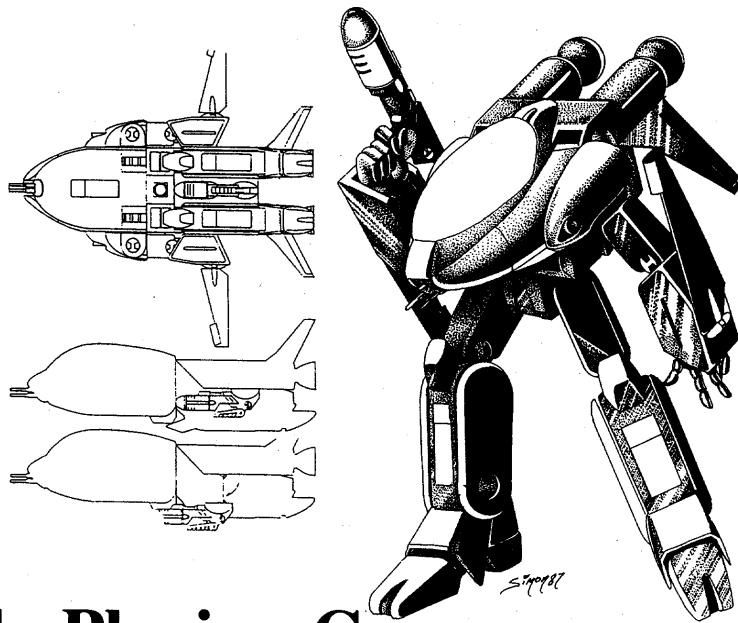
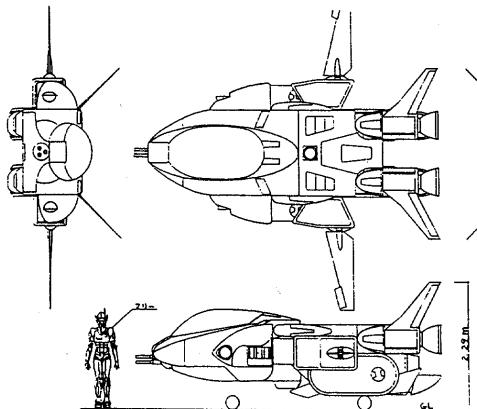
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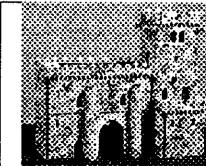
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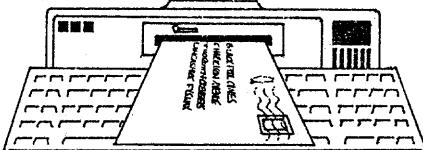
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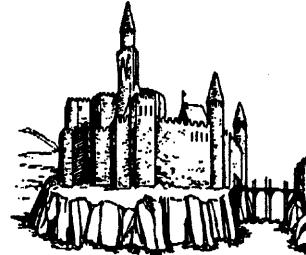
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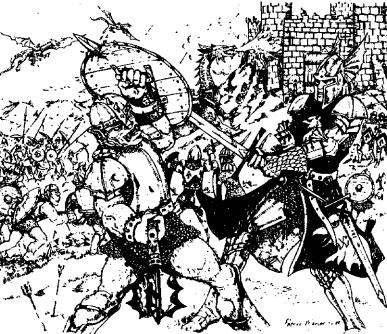
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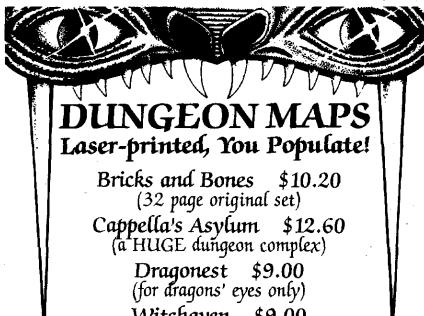
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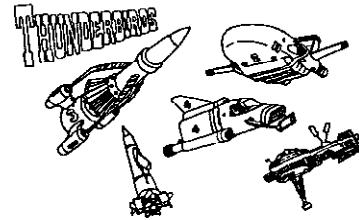
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Through the LOOKING Glasses



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Photos by Mike Bethke



"The People of the Land" (Ral Partha Enterprises)

The Dark Ages and the DARK SUN™ world, in miniature

This month, we're going to go right into the reviews. I wish to thank Ruth Dixon and Chris Osburn for their able assistance in the painting department. Even I am doing some painting to help you enjoy some color in this issue.

Ral Partha Enterprises
5938 Carthage Ct.
Cincinnati OH 45212

RP 10-540 "The People of the Land" *****

"The People of the Land" is the best miniature representation for the AD&D® game's DARK SUN™ world. There are a large number of other packs and accessories of miniatures for this campaign setting, but this one set gives you a cross-section of personalities that allows you to

cover most of the races involved in the campaign world without having to buy additional sets or figures. The set is composed of 20 different 25-mm-scale lead castings, as follows:

Sadira—This miniature is 23 mm high and is petite for this world. The pants and shorts both have holes in front. A sheath for a dagger hangs on her hip. There was no flash on this figure.

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

Neeva—The back of this figure's boots are plain, but the back of her cape is chainlike or beaded and falls straight to the ground. The crest on her leather helmet stretches to the back of her head. The mace she carries is four-sided and has a smooth handle. The figure matches an illustration on one of the DARK SUN modules exactly. No flash was evident on this figure.

Rikus—A wide gladiatorial belt surrounds the waist of this figure, which has excellent muscle detail and no flash.

Human gladiator—This figure is mounted on a thick, circular base. The figure stands 27 mm tall, which fits its game statistics in 25 mm scale. His only armament is a mace. His muscular back is bare, covered only by straps, and his buttocks are exposed but for a thong support. His hair falls straight to mid-back, including a topknot. This is a good figure except for some strange leg-muscle bulges; his costume is that of the ultimate fighter. No flash was present.

Female human shaman—A ragged animal skin serves as a floor-length cape for this figure. The two totems look almost like a jaw. The right side of her face is slightly deformed; the illustration on the box makes one unsure as to whether this was intentional. Her muscles are well done. There was no flash.

Halfling warrior—The back of the halfling is almost the same as its front, except for several straps on his legs and a torn and ragged bottom on his shirt. His hair is slightly spiked. A well-done flint spearhead tops his weapon. His expression is grim, and facial features and muscles are good. No flash was on this figure, which stands 15 mm tall.

Dwarf warrior—The dwarf has a strap-crossed bare back, short hair, and a bare neck and legs. His shorts are ragged and uneven, and he wears low boots. Muscle detail is very good, but there was some light flash at the legs that was easily cleaned.

Dwarf gladiator—This dwarf is even blockier than the other and wears rope-thong sandals, ragged pants, and straps across his back. His bald head shows a very Klingon-like ridge from front to back.

His weapon needs some trimming in the tooth area.

Elf shaman—This figure depicts a de-spoiler wizard. Simple boots and bare legs are visible beneath a ragged multilayered robe over which is a tooth necklace. A fabric cap waves in the breeze as he holds a bone fragment towards the sky. A load of spell components including a small bell hang on his left side. No mold marks were visible.

Elf warrior—A sheath hangs from his right hip while a strange crown rests on his head. A belt secures the sheath and binds his tattered clothing. High-topped, fold-over boots cover his legs and pants' bottoms; a hood covers his neck and head. His bare hand holds a simple sword high in the air. No flash was present on this figure.

Female half-elf ranger—This is a really nice figure that could be used as a character in other AD&D campaigns. Her cape swirls out over a short skirt and a small expanse of bare leg. High boots rise to the thigh, and pouches hang from her right side. Her staff looks like she is pulling it out of the ground rather than leaning on it. Only a slight mold line detracts from this piece.

Gith warriors—There are three of these creatures in the set, the figures differing in posture and armor. All have topknots and cloth helmets, and all would measure about 35 mm tall if the figures were straightened. There was some light flash around the feathers and spears.

Mul savage—This piece gave me a lot of trouble. Both weapons are extremely fragile; one came broken. The figure's back has a braided belt with pouches and a square harness. The pointed ears and bald head offset his grim expression. The base has a bad mold line that needs repair.

Half-giant warrior—This miniature has a tooth-studded belt and a front harness connected with buckles. Muscle detail is slightly exaggerated and the figure doesn't look as good as the others, but this is in part due to its simple nature.

Anakor—This figure is almost exactly the same as its picture, though its picture is shown at an angle.

Gith shaman—This figure is positioned on top of a hill. The miniature is a two-piece casting, with the lower left arm and fragile spear being one piece. Some cleaning was needed at the joint, but the pieces fit well. You must be careful when handling this piece. No other flash was noted.

Thri-kreen warrior—Standing 39 mm in height, this creature is covered by belts, medals, and necklaces. Double support harnesses cross the insect's back. Our sample had no antenna in spite of the illustration, nor were there any in the box. The antenna can be made out of thread or wire, however. There was flash on the trident and the legs.

Dragon king—This figure is the largest in the set at 78 mm in height. This is a three-piece casting that has a terrible



"The People of the Land" (Ral Partha Enterprises)



Giant Griffon (Viking Forge)

tendency to not stay together even after cleaning.

This package is highly recommended for anyone who is starting a DARK SUN campaign. It gives you a complete character group at the reasonable price of \$29.95 for 20 figures, some of them quite large.

The Viking Forge

1727 Theresa Lane
Powhatan VA 23139

FM43 Giant Griffon

The giant griffon is a solid-lead, three-

piece casting supposedly molded in 25-mm scale. The wingspan is about 87 mm, with the wings in a raised position. The wings are secured to the body by placing the tab ends into slots in the body, which should be deepened for extra strength. Feather detail is fair, shallow, and might disappear with heavy priming and painting. The head of the beast resembles a falcon or hawk more than an eagle. The front feet are extended outward but show little detail, as its digits blend into solid masses. The lion's body detail is fair, but the muscle detail looks more like varicose veins rather than the flowing muscles usually



The Keep (Old Guard Hobbies)

found on a large cat. The figure stands roughly 51 mm tall, and the base is an oval is molded to represent rough terrain.

This is not a highly recommended piece, especially at the price of \$5 per figure. It will take careful painting to redeem this miniature. This company does have a number of excellent products, so don't judge them by this figure alone.

Old Guard Hobbies

27508 Ford Rd.
Garden City MI 48135

The Keep

***** 1/2

This building is scaled to 25 mm and

represents a round keep of the type usually used as a defensive position or fortified outpost protecting a narrow pass or overlooking a river. The model consists of two buildings: the keep and a tower built in an interlocking fashion. The figure is 244 mm at its widest and just over 225 mm high. The exterior is designed to represent stones with deep-set cracks that represent mortar joints. The entrance to the keep is a large, arched doorway with a wooden door that can be opened only from the inside. This door is accessed by a large stone staircase with stone banisters, including a smashed flagstone top.

The model also has a small barred door about 3' off the ground in the main keep. Stone-framed arrow slits show that there are at least three levels above ground and one below. A large double window covered by wooden shutters opens onto the meeting area. Arrow slits rising along the side of the tower show winding steps that provide access to the large, protected stone roof of the keep. The merlons have framed arrow slits providing a wide field of fire and protection. The outer walls appear to have suffered battle damage or erosion.

Old Guard claims that the building is made of an expansion foam similar to styrofoam. While this may be true, the material also is very similar to that used in the old Greenfield Garrison buildings. The inside is partially hollow in a way that supports the outer skin rather than providing any usable inside rooms. Another problem is that even in the best castings there are a number of air-bubble marks and pits in the stone. These are easily fixed by use of putty and a small knife to recreate the mortar cracks covered by the putty. The arrow slits can be opened with the careful use of a small screwdriver or hobby knife. The upper slots should be

drilled out or carefully trimmed using a Dremel tool or a long-bladed knife. You should use water-based paints, as foam has a tendency to melt with oil-based paint, as I've learned from past experience (I was not brave enough to experiment with this piece).

I am nevertheless happy with this piece and wish only that the interior was more usable. I look forward to the "giant castle" set coming later, of which this keep can be a part, and feel that the price of \$29.95 is reasonable for something light, detailed, and fairly strong.

Fantascenes

Box P
Pine Plains NY 12567

1-02 Banquet Tables Laden with Food

***** 1/2

1-06 Round Table with Food and Stools

***** 1/2

1-11 Chairs

Every city adventure in a role-playing games seems to contain at least one major tavern or inn encounter. The three sets of miniatures provided for review here represent an alternative to the tedious job of drawing out the floor plan and trying to remember which chair was thrown or which table was overturned.

The articles of furniture all share several common elements. They are scaled to true 25-mm scale and made of lead. Each piece represents rough-hewn furniture made in medieval times using early tools, so they look crude and badly sculpted if you don't remember the era these figures represent. The tables and their chairs come in several pieces. No bases are molded to the figures. Equip yourself with files, a knife, and super glue before beginning to work on these miniatures.

When assembled, the table pieces create two tables loaded with food. The first is a plain plank supported by block legs. Wood-grain detail appears on the tabletop, legs, and beam support. The tabletop has three loaves of bread on a platter, a cheese ring on a towel or cheesecloth, and meat and vegetables on a serving platter next to a plate full of fruit. Two wine bottles and a pitcher supply the liquid refreshment, while empty cups sit near a bowl of gravy. The second table has a groove around the top. A serving platter complete with handles features a game hen surrounded by different vegetables and a drumstick bone. A fork and carving knife rest beside a line of sausages or breads. A plate of meat and potatoes, a wine bottle, and a bowl of serving utensils finish off the detail on this piece. The chair pieces form two types of high-backed chairs that can provide seating for these two tables.

The round tables contain the remains of food or the beginnings of a meal. The food on table one consists of sliced bread, the remains of something in a wooden bowl, two cups, and silverware as well as an-



Tables and chairs (Fantascenes)

other bowl and place settings. The second table has one place setting including a napkin and an eating knife, a candle, a wine decanter, and two widgets. Seats are simple wooden stools with large leg supports. The tables are each supported by a trestle-type leg.

You will have to put some work into these pieces. Each flat surface on the table joints had to be smoothed out, as did the legs. Mold lines are present on almost every side but can be removed with a knife or file, although the stools with the round tables appear as if their mold was not seated correctly. The biggest headache for me was the chairs. Each chair had at least one leg that was longer than the others. Care must be taken with chairs so as not to cut through the legs and arms when removing flash.

Even with the work involved, I recommend these pieces of furniture for either dioramas or as playing pieces. The price is \$4.95 per package.

Lance and Laser

P.O. Box 14491
Columbus OH 43214

P-004 Knight and Lady

This pack contains two figures made of lead and scaled to true 25-mm scale. Neither figure had any flash, and both have thick, round bases with well-detailed wooden floors. The lady appears to be in her late 40s or early 50s, with a proud, upswept chin and a serious look. Her pinched mouth and tight face, combined with the eyes and posture, projects the toughness of her life. Her hair is completely covered by a hat; a short back cloth could serve as a veil if needed. Her voluminous pleated dress stretches to the ground; her billowing sleeves are trimmed with fine lace. Her waist is cinched by a large gold belt set just under her bosom. The figure's posture projects a certain arrogance.

The knight is dressed in tights, pointed toe slippers, and a jerkin. He is armed with a short knife that hangs sheathed from his slim leather belt. He appears middle-aged and has a stern frown on his face. A life-time of adventuring shows in his wrinkles. His head is covered by a fur-trimmed hat. His right hand holds flowers for his lady, presented in a certain gruff manner.

These figures are excellent and could be used with the Minifigs Fantascenes furniture and other packages of knights and ladies to form a diorama of a castle feast. They'll also make excellent player characters in any medieval fantasy game. This set is highly recommended for people who don't want just another pretty face, and it costs \$3 per pack.

L&L #131 Tripod of Skulls ***** L&L #132 Skulls on Spikes *****

Lance and Laser has presented two miniature packs with similar themes. The



Knight and Lady (Lance and Laser)



Skulls on Spikes and Tripod of Skulls (Lance and Laser)

tripod of skulls has three poles driven into the ground, joined by knotted ropes. The pole and rope detail is excellent, with grain and bark clearly visible on the pole and knots and braids on the ropes. Each pole has a skull firmly secured to it, the skull still having patches of hair on it. This set is definitely an eye-catcher and a good buy as a player-character terrorizer or for diorama use at \$1.50 per pack.

The second pack contains two each of five different skulls on poles, each with interesting details. All five are on round stands with slight mold lines that are easily removed. Two of the bases have no

extra detail, two have four large rocks, and the last has four small rocks. Each pole has the same detail mentioned for the tripod review. The differences are in the little extras on the skulls and poles.

These figures are not for the queasy; they should cause your dioramas to look more forbidding and give characters pause. They are well worth the \$4.50 price per pack.



Winged Skeleton (Black Dragon Pewter)

Black Dragon Pewter

Unit 303
2437 Bay Area Blvd.
Houston TX 77058

9719 Winged Skeleton

This servant of death moves about on spread wings. The piece is a non-scaled pewter model that stands 90 mm from the bottom of its base to the top of its wings. The figure, minus pedestal, measures 57 mm high; the wingspan is larger than

some of the dragons we have reviewed in this column, even though the skeleton's wings are folded. The pedestal is a rounded hump with a bolted-on platform, with a winged skull on the front and four blocked supports on each face. The skeleton wears torn, rotting floor-length robes and a hooded cape. The robes are secured by a chain and by clasps at the neck.

The figure has an exposed rib cage with visible ribs spaced well apart. Bony hands grip a scythe, which has good wood grain detail and a sharp edge. The wings are folded and have very good feather and vein detail. A fleshless skull grins at you, with two red "gems" placed in the eye sockets.

This figure is worth the relatively low price of \$36 for a pewter piece of this size.

Grenadier Models

P.O. Box 305
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51023 Goblin spiderider warrior

51031 Goblin spiderider wizard

51032 Goblin spiderider hero

51033 Goblin spiderider leader

51034 Goblin spiderider gunner

Cavalry is important to any army for scouting, flanking, and harassment. Cavalry that can climb a vertical wall is even better, and this group of spider cavalry should win a place of importance in any goblin army. The spider mounts are scaled to the larger 25- to 30-mm scale and are

identical for all five different riders. Since this is the case, we will cover the spiders first, then each rider separately.

The spider is a four-piece lead casting. The rear legs are molded onto a body that stretches just over 40 mm long and 15 mm wide, all complete with hair molded on. Clean-up work was needed in different spots on the legs and joints and on the mold lines on the head and body. Care must be taken when working on the head, as it is easy to damage the eyes or pincers. The multifaceted eyes are not highly visible but are discernible. The spider is in an attack posture, so you must wait till the glue dries to get the miniature to stand level after cleaning. There is no saddle or bridle on any of the spiders, so they may be used as "normal" giant spiders as well as cavalry.

The goblin leader sits on an elaborate saddle that holds a bedroll, water and food containers, padding, and a spiked shield that provides protection for the spider's face. The goblin's personal shield is attached by a loop to the poles on the back of the saddle. The pole is topped with an elf's head and the skull of an animal. The leader has his hair in a topknot that flows down his back. A jerkin, pants, bracers, and boots finish his clothing. He holds one sword raised towards the sky; another sword hangs from a belt on his hip. His left hand signals a charge.

The goblin gunner comes as a two-piece casting. The lower half contains the legs, tucked up against the spider and clothed in loose pants, with a sheathed sword, a shield, and large pouch. The gun support is on the front of the casting. The upper casting is nearly flat, with almost no space between the shoulders, gun, and head. Facial features are pinched. The long sleeved shirt is covered by a small shield at the shoulder, and the head wears a large stocking cap. A large gun points forward.

The goblin warrior is sitting on a simple saddle. He wears loose clothes with large discs tied or sewn onto his shirt. His head is bare, and his hair drops behind him; his orclike face sneers at his opponents. His right hand holds a large, two-handed sword; his left sports a tiny shield with a snake engraved on it. Muscles bulge as he proceeds into combat.

The wizard is sitting on a simple saddle and is dressed in long robes and a hood. His arms protrude from torn sleeves; his right hand clutches a wooden staff. A variety of bags, pouches, water flasks, and other containers hang from his rope belt. His face is scrunched with his tongue out as if he is casting a spell.

The hero carries a shield with a skull motif and a great sword on his back, with a rope wrapped around it. He is dressed in lightweight clothes and a vest. He has a smaller sword in his right hand; his left hand is curled into a fist as he shouts in defiance. His head is tilted back, covered with a pointed cap.

All of these figures had flash on them

Goblin Spideriders (Grenadier Models)

and were not up to normal Grenadier standards. The detail is there, but is so exaggerated in spots that the figures don't look quite right. They will, however, fit in well with Games Workshop figures. The main drawback is the price. At \$5.95 per pack (one spider and one rider), you will have to spend \$40-50 to get a unit and their leader. That's rough on a war gamer's budget.

Gren 1428 High Elves with Long Bows **** 1/2

The pack contains five one-piece archers, all of which have slightly different castings. Each elf has a long bow in hand and a quiver of arrows on his back. The elves are all protected by chain mail covered by a long surcoat. Four of the elves have long swords in scabbards behind their backs. Two have their quivers held over the shoulder by straps. Two have helmets with feathers, one has an unadorned helmet, and two have no helmets, their high cheeks and stern features framed by shoulder-length hair. All of the figures have gauntlets and bare legs.

The figures are very good but do have some very obvious problems. There are a lot of loose ends from the molds' air ports and a fair amount of light flash. Mold lines are very noticeable, especially where they occur on the outer part of each figure's left leg, and the lines are not easy to remove. Worse still is the fact that it will take a minimum of three packs in order to get a 10-12 elf unit with a commander, and even then you will have extras. These extras could be used as skirmishers or snipers, though, so it won't be a total loss. This is still a good package of elves. The price for a pack of five is \$5.95.



High Elves with Long Bows (Grenadier Models)



High Elf (Grenadier Models)

RAFM Co.
20 Parkhill Rd.
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CANADA N1R 1P2

RAFM 2929-Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua

This miniature is scaled to 25 mm, according to the catalog, and is a three-piece lead casting. The base looks like a rubbish heap with a variety of bubbles, tentacles, vines, and mouths. This disgusting mess measures 50 mm at its widest and 12 mm tall. The base connects to a vertical stalk that branches into two mouths and forms the base for the third section, which is like a giant head and mouth with one eye in the center of the head. Does it sound scary yet? I forgot about the mouth stalks, eyes, and vines leading to the tendrils around the mouth. When assembled, the creature is over 62 mm high.

The pieces did not fit together well. There was some initial confusion on how the parts went together; when I finally figured it out, the pieces did not seat properly and required filling. The easiest way to fill was to insert the putty tube in the

bottom of the base and squeeze upward. When the putty went through the holes you couldn't tell it from the molded vegetation. The gap in the upper area was hidden by the tentacles. To finish the creature, all I needed to do was clean off some flash.

The last piece in this set is a small marker with an observer and arcane markings on the side. This little guy could act as a trigger or as a warning. This is a one-piece casting with no flaws.

This creature is intended for use with the CALL OF CTHULHU* game from Chaosium, Inc. Even with the work involved, it's not a bad piece and could be used in other games as some horrid beastie as well. Its price is \$5 each.

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#105 Orcs with Hand Weapons **** 1/2

The environmental concerns over lead figures continues, with lead being labeled as the frivolous ingredient in miniatures, Environmentalists asked someone in the



Orcs with Hand Weapons (Heartbreaker)

industry to do something about it, and a new company called Heartbreaker has introduced a line poured from a tin alloy rather than lead.

This set is one of the first releases from Heartbreaker. The figures are scaled to the

larger 25-mm Citadel figure size so popular with GW's WARHAMMER* games rather than true 25-mm scale. This pack contains three figures, three slotted plastic bases, and a spare axe, sword, and small shield.

Figure one represents an orc wearing fur trunks, a spiked knee protector, and a shoulder protector held up by a studded belt. His muscle tone is good except for a slight pot belly, and his face is rather human in appearance, being slightly flat with big teeth and a pug nose. On his left arm is a large shield with a flat surface. A water skin hangs on his belt. His right hand holds a large, two-edged sword. The base is loose against the stand, and the figure will need some adhesive. There was no flash on this figure.

Figure two comes with a short, well-done Mohawk hairdo. His muscular legs and feet are bare, while his pudgy frame is clothed in a large tunic supported by a studded belt with buckle, to which is also attached an elf's head, a bag, and a large purse. Overlapping strips of armor protect his chest and stomach, while over-the-shoulder belts secure a small shield in the center of his back. In his left hand he holds a metal-plated wooden shield with no markings; his right hand holds a huge spiked mace with a wooden handle. He has an annoyed expression. The figure did not stand well on its base, and we had to bend the bar across the feet slightly to get it to lean forward. No flash was present on this model, but a very faint mold line is visible.

The last figure in the set represents a much more cautious orc, dressed in boots with armored toes and fold-over tops. His legs are bare, but his upper torso is covered in a skin covered by chain mail. His left arm supports a metal-covered wooden shield; both wrists are adorned with bracers. A large battle axe is held in his left hand. A simple helmet tops his head and is surrounded by the long hair falling from underneath. His expression looks like he just bit into a lemon. The tab on this figure had to be bent slightly for it to stand straight, and there was no flash.

These figures are very good, both environmentally and in their detail, but the price for three figures is \$4.95. These figures are prime examples for our arguments in favor of lead, though I wish this company all the luck in the world and hope it can bring the price down.

If you want to reach me, you can do so at my store from 2P.M.-10P.M. CST MWTh or 10A.M.-5P.M. CST weekends. Call: (708) 336-0790; or write to me at:

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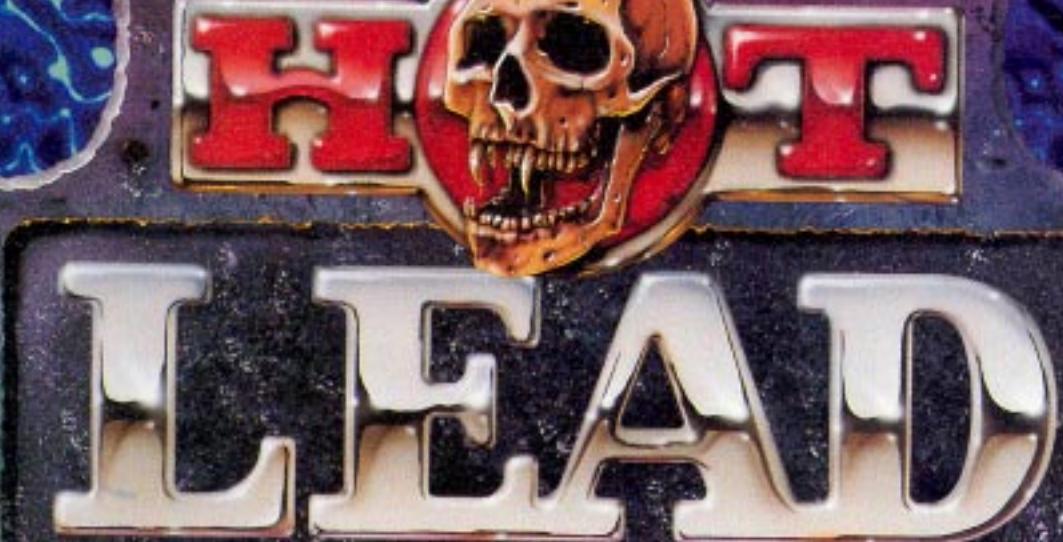
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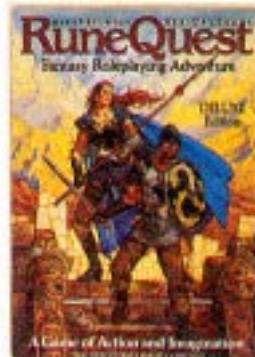
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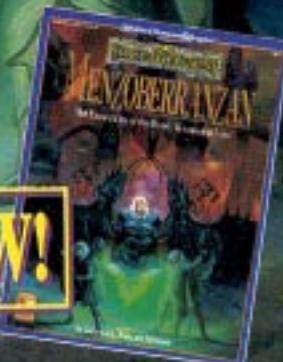
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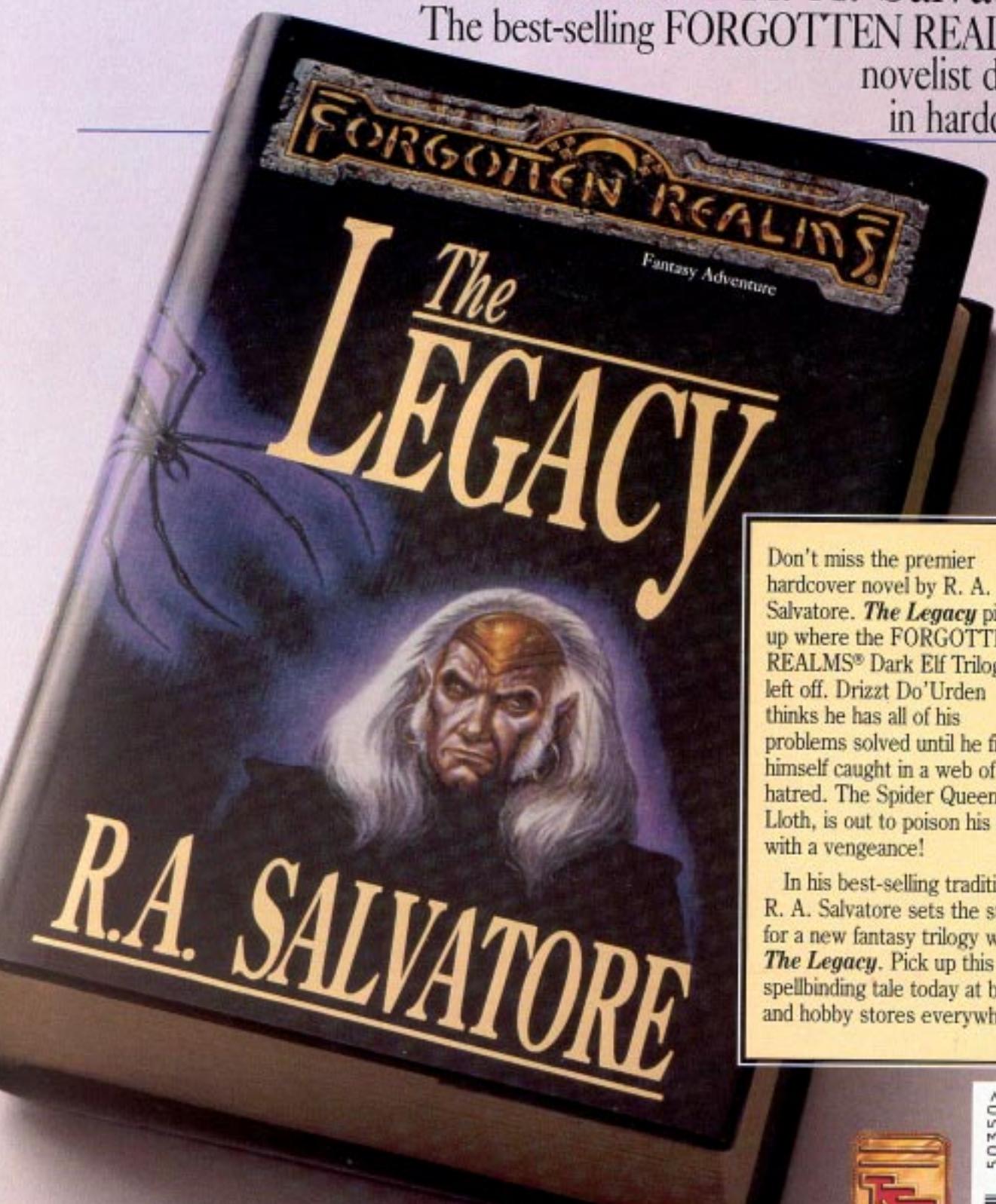


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